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THE LORD'S COMING,  
ISRAEL,  
AND THE CHURCH.


PRINTED BY BALLANTYNE AND COMPANY  
EDINBURGH AND LONDON



THE  
L O R D ' S    C O M I N G,  
ISRAEL,  
AND  
THE CHURCH.

BY  
T. B. BAINES.

LONDON:  
REEVES AND TURNER,  
196 STRAND, AND 185 FLEET STREET.  
1875.



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# THE LORD'S COMING, ISRAEL, AND THE CHURCH.

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## INTRODUCTION.

EVERYBODY is aware of the difference prevailing among the Lord's people as to the interpretation of those passages of Scripture which foretell the future in reserve for the Church and the world.

The ordinary interpretation is, that the promises contained in the Psalms and Old Testament prophecies refer to the Church, which, as the spiritual Israel, has taken the place, in God's purposes, of the literal Israel, to whom these promises were given. So, the fulfilment of the promises is taken to be spiritual rather than literal, being brought about by the gradual spread of Christianity, and the blessings of peace and prosperity following the universal triumph of the gospel. This world-wide dominion of truth and happiness is presumed to be the period of a thousand years, during which Satan is bound, and the saints reign with Christ. It is supposed that at the close

of this time, after another brief outbreak of Satan's craft and human wickedness, the world is destroyed ; and that there is then a general resurrection of the dead, both bad and good, to be judged before the great white throne. This is interpreted as the event called "the coming of the Lord," "the appearing of the Lord," "the day of the Lord," "the end of the age" (mis-translated "world"), and "the coming of the Son of man"—names supposed all to refer to the same period, the closing up of the history, and indeed, of the existence, of the habitable globe.

There is, however, another interpretation given to the Scriptures describing these events, which may be briefly stated as follows. The Old Testament prophecies, except where manifestly figurative, are to receive a literal fulfilment. The promises given to Israel are to be made good to Israel, not to the Church. The Old Testament prophecies being thus taken from the Church, the New Testament is found to contain no predictions of the universal spread of Christianity, but, on the contrary, sad forecasts of corruption, leading to judgment, in the body professing the name of Christ. In the midst of this gloom, however, the prospect of the Lord's coming for His saints, shines as a bright hope for the hearts of the faithful. This coming, the date of which is purposely left undetermined, instead of being at the end of the world, is preliminary to the judgments awaiting the world, and to the reign of Christ with His saints. When it occurs, the living saints will be caught up to meet



the Lord in the air, and at the same time will take place, in part at least, "the first resurrection," when the dead in Christ will be raised. Then follow the woes which usher in "the day of the Lord," when Israel is restored, Old Testament prophecy fulfilled, Satan bound, and the dominion of Christ established on the earth. At its close Satan is loosed, the nations rebel, the world is consumed, and "the rest of the dead" are judged.

I propose to inquire which of these interpretations is correct. The question is not one of mere curiosity, still less an intrusion into regions we are forbidden to tread. The distinction which our Lord draws between the servant and the friend is that "the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth," while He told His disciples, as friends, all things that He had heard of His Father (John xv. 15). In the same discourse He promises to send "the Spirit of truth," the Comforter, to show them "things to come" (John xvi. 13). Indeed, the very thought that the constant references to the future scattered through the sacred writings are not meant to be understood, carries its own refutation. And, as if foreseeing the spirit of unbelief and indifference which characterises the present time, the Holy Ghost has, in the introduction to the Apocalypse, the most distinctively prophetic portion of the New Testament, pronounced a special blessing on those "that hear the words of this prophecy and keep those things which are written therein" (Rev. i. 3).

While, moreover, it is admitted that the interpretation of prophecy may be attempted in a frivolously inquisitive spirit, are not those who turn a deaf ear to its promises and warnings themselves guilty of the same irreverence which they censure in others? For the object of prophecy is to unfold God's purposes with respect to the glory of His Son, whom man has refused, but whom God has exalted, and to whom every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess. In the contemplation of this theme, He invites His chosen ones to share. And who are those chosen ones? Are they mere lookers on? No, thanks be to God, we who believe in Jesus are His fellow-heirs—all things are ours. God invites us to look at the inheritance He has Himself prepared for us in joint possession with the Son of His love. And surely, as in the enjoyment of that inheritance, the "first-born," in whom we have our acceptance, will be the one object of our worship and delight, so in its contemplation now, our brightest thought should be that we are gazing on the portion prepared for Him who alone is worthy "to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." To study prophecy with any more trivial object is to lose sight of this glorious end. It is like studying the movements of the solar system from the orbits of the more distant planets, without taking account of the central globe round which the whole revolves. But, on the other hand, to neglect it as unprofitable, because it does not contribute to our personal salvation,

is a piece of selfishness derogatory to the claims of Christ, and unworthy of the condescending goodness of God in thus taking us into His own counsels. It is a deliberate preference of the position of a servant to that of a friend, a declaration that so long as our own interests are secured, we are indifferent as to what God has told us concerning the glories of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Nor can we overlook the great practical importance of the inquiry. For surely there is a vast moral chasm between the two interpretations of coming events just indicated. If God's Word teaches that Christianity, instead of overspreading the world, will only prove, like Judaism, the incurable enmity of man to God, the jubilant and self-congratulatory tone prevalent in Christendom, is nothing better than Laodicean self-complacency, saying, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," while really it should be mourning that it is "wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. iii. 17). It is holding out a false and delusive hope, saying, "peace and safety," when "sudden destruction" is approaching. And if the world is hurrying on to judgment, Christians who see it will duly estimate the seductive cry of modern progress, and beware of entangling themselves in affairs over which such a doom is hanging.

While, therefore, the deep solemnity of the subject forbids all idle curiosity, its importance equally condemns all selfish indifference. These things are

written for our instruction, and it cannot be a matter of little moment whether the instruction which God has given is received or slighted, understood or misapprehended. Reverence for God's Holy Word, regard for the honour and glory of Christ, as well as the immense practical questions involved in the different schemes of interpretation, all unite in rebuking both the curious spirit in which the subject is too often approached, and the careless spirit in which it is too often avoided.

For the sake of clearness the best mode of looking at the subject will be to inquire—

FIRST, What is the immediate prospect placed before the believer? in other words, What is the hope of the Church, according to the Word of God? This will naturally lead us to look,

SECONDLY, At the promises of blessing and righteousness upon earth contained in the Old Testament Scriptures, and the mode in which these promises are to receive their fulfilment. Having thus distinguished between the hope of the Church and the prospect of blessing before the world, we shall be in a better position to ascertain and understand,

THIRDLY, The teaching of the Holy Ghost concerning the position held by the Church in God's dispensational dealings, and the moral relationship in which it stands towards the world, a matter involving the deepest and most practical lessons as to the walk suited to believers in the present age.



*PART FIRST.*

THE HOPE OF THE CHURCH.



## CHAPTER I.

### DIRECT TEACHING CONCERNING THE LORD'S RETURN FOR LIVING BELIEVERS.

THE point of most immediate interest to the believer is the meaning to be attached to the phrase, "The Coming of the Lord." Does Scripture in these words speak of the Christian's death, or of Christ's coming to raise and judge the dead at the end of the world? Or do the words hold out a hope of a totally different nature? I propose, in this first part, to examine what the Word of God says about the coming of the Lord, first as it affects the living saint, and next as it affects the dead.

The Old Testament Scriptures are full of the coming of the Messiah in glory and power. Indeed the Jews were so occupied with these prophecies that they overlooked those which foretold His coming in weakness and humiliation. His coming in power is often spoken of by Jesus Himself and by His disciples in their converse with one another. They ask, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming" (Matt. xxiv. 3); are told to watch, "for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (ver. 42); and admonished by the question—"When the Son of man cometh, shall He

find faith on the earth" (Luke xviii. 8) ? Christ's second coming was, therefore, expected by the disciples, and held a considerable place in His own teaching.

But in the epistles there appears another fact, a "mystery" hidden from the Old Testament prophets, and only hinted at by Jesus Himself. This is that the Lord's coming is divided into two different acts. The prophets only foretell the coming of the Messiah Himself. But the New Testament shows that in this glorious advent He will be accompanied by His saints. In order for this, however, it is necessary that before Jesus comes to reign over the earth, His saints should have been taken up to heaven. Accordingly the epistles make known that the first act in the Lord's coming will be to take believers to be with Himself, and the second His return with them to the world. When our Lord was on earth the time for revealing this mystery had not arrived, so that He usually speaks of His coming in general terms, without distinguishing its two different parts. Hence it is only from the epistles that we can fully understand His teaching on this subject, though when seen in their light, its Divine perfection becomes obvious.

In the first three gospels especially, the two parts, though both alluded to, are so blended, that it will be desirable to postpone the examination of their teaching until we have discovered the key by which its hidden treasures are unlocked. In the fourth gospel,

however, though the mystery is not distinctly revealed, the return of the Lord for His saints is held out as a hope before the hearts of the disciples. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus says, "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come again and receive you unto Myself*; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John xiv. 1-3). These words were spoken to comfort His disciples on His departure. He tells them that while absent He will prepare a place for them; and will presently return to take them to be with Himself.

This passage is often applied to the death of believers. Such an interpretation, however, is unwarranted by other scriptures, and is open to serious objection. The disciples knew, not only of a resurrection, but of the separate existence of the spirit, whether in happiness, like Lazarus, or in torment, like the rich man. If, therefore, Jesus was only telling them that after death their spirits would be with Him in paradise, He merely told them what they knew. Concerning death, moreover, it is said that the believer goes to be with Jesus, never that Jesus comes for the believer. Nor would the hope given to the disciples, at such a crisis, be that of entering into any imperfect state, such as the existence of the spirit even in paradise. The passage implies completeness, that perfect reunion which only takes place

“when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality.” Death is not the believer’s hope, but the redemption of the body. “If our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved,” still the hope is the “house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Paul is willing, no doubt, “to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord,” but his desire is, “not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life” (2 Cor. v. 1-9). This, the perfect state, is the true Christian hope, and surely in the parting words of comfort to His disciples, when promising to come again and take them to Himself, nothing short of the fulfilment of this hope can have been in the Lord’s mind.

That these words disclose a new prospect, not the spirit’s presence with Jesus after death, is clear from the closing verses of this gospel. There our Lord first foretells Peter’s death; then, being asked what should become of John, replies—“If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?” (John xxi. 22). Now this could not mean that John might live till the end of the world. But neither could it mean that John might go to be with Jesus at his death. In this case, how would he have differed from Peter or any of the other disciples? Moreover, this interpretation would rob the words of all meaning, making them equivalent to this—“If I will that he lives till he dies, what is that to thee?” The coming referred to, therefore, is

neither the departure to be with Jesus at death, nor His appearing at the end of the world.

Its true character is not far to seek. It is here spoken of, not as one of an indefinite number of similar events, like the deaths of individual believers, but as a single transaction, of which the disciples had already heard. Such a transaction Jesus had but lately named, when He promised to come again for His disciples. It is true He did not distinguish it from the other part of His coming, but He brought it out as a special feature, and it was to this feature that John's heart would turn when he heard the words uttered. What can be simpler? On a solemn occasion Jesus tells His disciples that He will come to take them to Himself. Shortly afterwards He bids them not to be surprised if one of them tarries till He comes. However little the disciples might yet be able to distinguish between the two parts of His coming, there can surely be no doubt that these utterances were meant to bring before their minds the same blessed hope.

These two passages, then, teach us: First, the return of Jesus for His saints, not at death or the end of the world, but at some definite though unrevealed period, when all shall be brought together to the place He has gone to prepare for them; and secondly, that this coming again, though uncertain as to time, might occur before the death of one, at least, of the apostles. So the disciples understood it, for there "went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple



should not die" (John xxi. 23), and though the Holy Ghost corrects this error, we are never told that it consisted in believing that Jesus *might* come in John's lifetime; still less in believing that if He did come, John would not die. Christ's own words expressly authorised the former belief; and other parts of Scripture make it clear that Christians living at the Lord's coming will be translated without seeing death. The disciples' error, therefore, did not consist in this understanding of the words of Jesus; but in adding to those words, and converting a statement that John *might* tarry into a prediction that he *would* tarry.

Nor is anything said about unusual longevity on the part of John. The time of the Lord's coming is studiously kept out of sight. The only event that must *necessarily* happen, according to these scriptures, before the promised return of Jesus for His disciples, was the martyrdom of Peter, a thing which, in an age of persecution, might have occurred at almost any hour. When that had taken place, there was no reason to be deduced from these passages why the return of Jesus should not be momentarily expected.

Let us look at the position of the early disciples, remembering that this was almost all the light they yet had on the subject. Of the two whose future career had been spoken of, one had been told that he must suffer death, the other that he *might* tarry till Jesus came. Would it not be a perfectly natural and lawful thing for John to be living in anticipation of the Lord's coming? Would it not, indeed, have

shown sad unbelief if he had *not* looked for translation, but had looked for death instead of translation? Would it not also have been lawful for the other disciples, Peter excepted, to anticipate that the Lord *might* come in their lifetime, and to have constantly before their souls the refreshing hope that the One whom they loved, and who had departed from them, would soon return to take them to Himself?

It is important to ascertain the legitimate effect which these words of our Lord would have on the minds of the disciples, because they were the only clear light on this subject which they yet possessed. It is true there were other prophecies as to His coming uttered by Himself, but these were intentionally obscure as to the great point here brought out, namely, the coming of the Lord for His saints apart from and before His coming in power and glory. In no other place had the Lord Jesus held out the hope of His return for His disciples, without reference to other events affecting His coming to the world. The hope, therefore, was clearly expressed, in very few words, and little capable of erroneous interpretations. It is a serious thing to maintain that a hope so clearly and definitely stated is a mistake; that the conclusion legitimately flowing from our Lord's own words was a conclusion which He did not mean His disciples to draw; that the hope reasonably founded on His own promise was a hope which He did not mean them to cherish. Rather, surely, should we infer that, though in His wisdom God has seen fit to conceal the time,

and though in His mercy He has seen fit to delay that event, which, however blessed for believers, puts a period to the grace in which He is now acting towards the world, yet His purpose was to hold out this coming of His Son as a precious perennial hope for the souls of those who are His.

But though our Lord's own language seems sufficiently plain, it may be asked, whether it is in agreement with other portions of God's Word? Christ's teaching, as we have said, only slightly touched this special subject of His separate advent for His saints; and He left its full significance to be brought to the hearts of His disciples by that Spirit of truth, who was to "teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance whatsoever He had said unto them." What, then, does this Holy Spirit teach us concerning the wondrous theme we are here considering?

The question is not treated at length in the Acts, which, however, contains a passage clearly announcing the Lord's return, in some form or other, before the end of the world. Immediately after His ascension, while the disciples still "looked steadfastly toward heaven, as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts i. 10, 11). Now no time is here mentioned, and if the passage stood by itself,

it might be supposed to refer to the end of the world. But, comparing it with other passages, this interpretation becomes impossible. For, in the first place, His coming again was to be "in like manner" with His ascension, and nothing can be conceived more unlike to this event than the appearance of the Judge upon the great white throne. Secondly, when the Judge then appears, He does not come to the world, for "the earth and the heaven flee away." It is the dead who are summoned before the Judge, not the Judge who comes to them. (Rev. xx. 11-15.) But, thirdly, our Lord had Himself constantly spoken of His coming, and had only recently named its effect upon the disciples as a special ground of consolation and hope, as the one precious comfort to stay their hearts during His absence. What, then, is more natural than that now, when He had just departed from His last earthly communion with them, the promise of His coming should once more be presented to their hearts? True, the two parts of the coming were not yet clearly made known, nor was the special hope of His return for His saints, as distinct from the other act, here revealed. Still the coming, of which this feature was now taught, is presented as a general hope, to cheer and calm the souls of the disciples.

But it is in the epistles, where the Spirit has fully unfolded "all that Jesus began both to do and teach" while here on earth, that this "mystery" of the separate coming for the saints, hitherto hid in the counsels of God, is first distinctly revealed. The

earliest of these epistles, as nearly all competent critics are agreed, is the first of those addressed to the Thessalonians. Paul had spent at the outside three or four weeks in Thessalonica (Acts xvii. 2), and the whole of the instruction possessed by the believers was derived from him during this brief visit, which was followed shortly by his first epistle. It is interesting, therefore, to observe the truth they had received, and to note its practical effect. On both these points the Holy Ghost has given full information. The apostle rejoices in their "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." They "were ensamples to all that believe." Not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place, people were relating how these Thessalonian converts had "turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, *and to wait for His Son from heaven*" (1 Thess. i. 9, 10). These, then, were the two characteristics of the Thessalonian Church. Can it be said that they are the distinguishing marks of Christians at the present day? It may be answered that all believers expect Jesus to come from heaven, and this is, no doubt, true. But surely no person, looking at modern Christians, would seize upon this as a leading feature of their faith. The expression appears to imply, what the rest of the epistle plainly shows, that there was among these Thessalonians something much more than a distant expectation of the Lord's coming at the end of the world; that it was a present hope, influencing all



their thoughts, their feelings, and their practical life, a hope so vivid and powerful as to attract the attention of "all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia."

If, then, this was a delusion arising from imperfect knowledge, how is it that the apostle, instead of putting them right, records this waiting attitude, side by side with their turning to God, as a portion of the bright testimony they were bearing? In the next chapter he again incidentally alludes to the hope, and again without the smallest hint that the Thessalonians had fallen into error, or were cherishing unfounded expectations. In the fourth chapter, to which we shall presently have occasion more fully to refer, the apostle alludes to the Lord's coming in these remarkable terms—"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that *WE* which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep;" and later, "then *WE*, which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds" (1 Thess. iv. 15-17). Jesus had told His disciples, that one of them might tarry till His return. Here the Holy Ghost intimates that believers then living might also remain to that time. He contrasts the "*we* which are alive" with "*them* which are asleep." What is the significance of the word "*we*" used in this manner? A speaker might say to his audience—"We who live to the end of this century." It would not mean that any of them *must* live till then, merely that they might. But it would be senseless to say—"We who live to the end of the

next century." So, here, the Holy Ghost is not revealing the time of Christ's return, but, while leaving this indefinite, is urging the hope which God would have believers cherish. If He did not mean them to be looking for the Lord's coming during their own lifetime, the use of the first person would be not only meaningless but erroneous.

Compare this language with our Lord's own words. Jesus says—"I will come again ;" Paul says—"The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven." Jesus says—"I will receive you unto Myself ;" Paul says that the believer still living "shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air." Jesus gives as His motive, "That where I am there ye may be also ;" Paul declares—"So shall we ever be with the Lord." Jesus gives His promise that the hearts of the disciples might not be troubled ; Paul exhorts sorrowing believers to "comfort one another with these words." There can surely be no question that these passages, running so closely parallel, relate to the same event. And what is the event ? Not the end of the world, for it might happen in the lifetime of the generation then on the earth. Not death, for the living were to be caught up without seeing death. It can be nothing else, then, but the coming of the Lord for His own, according to the gracious promise He had, before His departure, given the disciples.

Very similar, and in some respects even stronger, is the language used by the same apostle in addressing the Corinthian Church. "Behold," he says, "I



show you a mystery. We shall NOT all sleep, but we SHALL all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and WE shall be changed " (1 Cor. xv. 51, 52). Here, then, we are expressly told, what in the other passage we might confidently infer, that those living at the Lord's coming for His saints shall not die, but shall be changed. But is not this coming at the end of the world? Let us look closely at the text. There is no mention here made of the resurrection of unbelievers. The two classes put in contrast are, therefore, believers who will be living at this advent, and believers who are dead. Now, in which of these classes does the apostle range himself and those to whom he was writing? Not with the dead, but with the living. Had he meant that both he and they would be in their graves, he would have said—"The trumpet shall sound, and we shall be raised incorruptible, and the living shall be changed." So modern theology puts it. The Holy Ghost inverts it, classing the present generation as those who might live to the Lord's coming. If it be said that the Spirit, who searcheth "the deep things of God," must have known that the Thessalonians would die before the Lord's return, and cannot, therefore, have meant them to look out for it as a present hope, the answer is, that Christ himself *did* so place it before John; though, of course, *He* knew that it would not happen till after John's death. "The foolishness of God is

wiser than men." These words were chosen that the hope of the Lord's coming might be ever present to the believer's heart.

But does not scripture expressly say that "it is appointed unto men once to die?" Let us examine the passage in which these words occur. Speaking of Christ's one offering, it says—"Now once, in the end of the world, hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself: and as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment, so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time, apart from sin, unto salvation" (Heb. ix. 26--28).

This doubtless shows that, since sin entered, it is the order of nature that man should die. But why is this stated here? Simply to bring out the fact that Jesus has taken man's place, and endured the death and judgment which were his due. The argument is that as these were appointed to man in consequence of sin, so, in like manner—Christ suffered the same lot; and now, having on His first appearing borne death and judgment as the believer's substitute, He can appear to him a second time, having nothing more to do with sin, for his salvation. This is in harmony with the whole argument of the chapter, which contrasts the partial and temporary result of the Levitical sacrifices with the perfect work of Christ, who "now once, in the end of the world, hath appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

Instead of proving, therefore, that death and judgment must necessarily come upon man, the text shows that neither death nor judgment, as the penalty for sin, remain to the believer.

And this is obvious from another consideration. The text declares that "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." If it proves, then, that the believer must die, it proves that he must be judged; and if it does not prove that he must be judged, it does not prove that he must die. But our Lord Himself says—"He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment" (John v. 24). The word in the original is the same as in the Hebrews, though our translation renders it "condemnation." The believer, then, has passed out of the condition described in this text, and having escaped the judgment, which is one penalty of sin, he cannot be liable to the death, which is the other.

But, if so, why do believers die? Not as the penalty for sin, for if the believer has to bear any part of the penalty of sin, the atonement of Christ is not a perfect work. But though the *penalty* for sin has gone, the *consequences* of sin have not yet been thoroughly effaced, nor will be until "the redemption of the body." As connected with the old creation, the body is "of the earth, earthy," and as such liable to natural decay. It is no longer *judicially* subject to death, and therefore, should the Lord come before its powers are exhausted, it will be changed at once, without tasting

death, from "the image of the earthly into the image of the heavenly." But it is *naturally* subject to decay, and should the Lord tarry till its strength fails, it falls asleep and awaits its own redemption and the Lord's coming in the grave, instead of upon the earth. Hence the death of the believer is spoken of in figures pointing to its transitory nature and blessed termination—"falling asleep in Jesus," pulling down a tabernacle, or "sowing in weakness" what is "raised in power."

## CHAPTER II.

### INDIRECT REFERENCES TO THE LORD'S COMING FOR LIVING BELIEVERS.

WE have looked at the direct teaching of scripture concerning the Lord's return for His living saints. The language is clear, setting it forth as a present hope, and, though avoiding dates, speaking of it as an event for which the believer should be constantly waiting. God does not repeat Himself, and we have not elsewhere the same full statement of the doctrine, but the epistles abound in allusions to it from which we may gather much valuable truth. Such incidental references prove the familiarity of the hope to the early Christians, the large place it occupied in their thoughts and hearts, and the various practical aspects in which it was regarded. It is in this last light that it may be most convenient for us now to examine them.

I. The expectation of the Lord's speedy return is constantly used as an incentive to sobriety, moderation, and godliness of walk. Thus the apostle, after various practical exhortations, writes—  
“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for *now is our salvation*

*nearer* than when we believed. The night is far spent, *the day is at hand*; let us, therefore, cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light" (Rom. xiii. 11, 12). Now "salvation" is here held out as a near prospect, and the question is, what the salvation referred to means? It is not conversion or forgiveness of sins, for these are not a hope, but a present portion; the believer being "in Christ," and subject neither to condemnation nor separation. It is not death, at least death is never elsewhere thus described. It is not the end of the world, for that, as the Romans knew, was a distant event, to the near approach of which any appeal would have been both fruitless and false.

What, then, is the "salvation" here spoken of? We have seen that in the Hebrews "salvation" is connected with the Lord's coming "the second time." Having put away sin at His first coming, He will "appear the second time,"—not to the world, but—"unto them that look for Him," "apart from sin unto salvation." All believers look for Jesus, and I doubt not that all are here included. Their salvation, then, takes place at His second advent.

If, therefore, "salvation" is used in the same sense in the Romans as in the Hebrews, the "salvation" which is said to be drawing near is that which is wrought by the coming of Jesus for His saints. But as the character and object of the epistles are different, it may be well to inquire whether any light as to the meaning of the word can be gathered from the



Romans itself. Let us take this passage—"We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope" (Rom. viii. 23, 24). The salvation here spoken of, then, is not security, or freedom from condemnation, which the believer already enjoys; but a hope for which, though having "the first fruits of the Spirit," he waits and even groans. Nor is it the death of the body or the spirit going to be with Jesus. Just the opposite; it is "the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." Believers are "predestinated to be conformed to the image of God's Son" (Rom. viii. 29). They have already "received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." But the body is not yet conformed to Christ's image, and the work of adoption is not completed until this also is redeemed. It is, then, for this we wait. This is the salvation for which we hope. But this "redemption of the body" is what Christ effects at His coming for His saints, when living believers "shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye;" or, as stated in Thessalonians, "we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." Salvation, then, in the Romans, as in the Hebrews, is the change wrought in believers when Jesus returns to take them to the place He has gone to prepare for them.

And how is this salvation spoken of? As a distant hope, to be realised at some remote period? No, but as a living hope, which might be realised at any

moment, and in the near prospect of which vigilance and sobriety are urged as befitting the Christian. It is regarded, indeed, as already at hand, for in God's thoughts one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. Times and seasons are in His power, and the believer's place is not to be calculating dates, but to be looking for the Lord's return. God in wisdom and grace may postpone the day ; but to the Church the hope should be ever present.

The Lord's coming is applied in the same practical way in the Epistle to the Philippians. They are warned not to "mind earthly things," and exhorted to follow the apostle: "For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our body of humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto His body of glory" (Phil. iii. 20, 21). Here, again, the apostle is waiting, not for death, but for the coming of Jesus, whom he expects as a Saviour, that is, One who brings salvation ; and the salvation He brings is that same "redemption of the body" named in Romans as the Christian's hope ; that same transformation described in Corinthians as the expectation of the living believer ; that same rapture referred to in Thessalonians as awaiting us "who are alive and remain ;" that same salvation spoken of in Hebrews as the object of Christ's second appearing to His own redeemed ones. And here, again, it is a present hope ; the apostle says—"We are looking for the Saviour," that is, are now in the attitude of expectation. Nor



is it merely the present tense which shows this. The immediate character of the hope is urged as a reason against their being engrossed with earthly things, just as, in the next chapter, they are exhorted—"Let your moderation (or yieldingness) be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand." The anticipation of the Lord's speedy return was to check self-assertion and self-seeking. It is no general exhortation to yieldingness, but an exhortation founded on the truth that the Lord is at hand. So real and practical was this hope to the Philippian believers !

It is used with a similar object in the Epistle to Titus. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. ii. 11-13). Here are two things looked for, "the appearing of the glory," and "that blessed hope." What is meant by these last words? Not conversion, for that is a fact; nor death, for that is never spoken of as a hope. In Romans the hope is "the redemption of the body," in Philippians the changing of the body into Christ's likeness, which would take place at His coming, and might be in the believer's lifetime. This hope, then, was familiar to Titus, and surely it can be to none other that the apostle alludes in these terms. This will be still more evident when we see how closely the other part of Christ's coming, here

called "the appearing of the glory," is associated with the first act of His return for His saints. But apart from this inference, the nature of the hope held out in the other epistles, makes it morally certain that the "blessed hope" thus mentioned, is the same to which such frequent reference is elsewhere made.

As a prospect exercising a sanctifying power over the soul, it is further used by Paul in writing to the Thessalonians. He desires that their "whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. v. 23). Now if the Lord's advent might be expected in their lifetime, this language is quite natural. But how could it be used, if the Holy Ghost meant believers to regard this coming as long after their own deaths? Where death is looked for, the words are—"I am ready to be offered up," or, "Be thou faithful unto death." Such language is used by most Christians as of universal application. Why, then, does the Spirit here speak so differently? Why does He bid them look for the Lord's coming instead of death? Surely because the Lord's coming, and not death, is that for which He would have the believers waiting. This attitude of longing expectation is what Jesus and the Holy Ghost alike enjoin. And so, in writing at a later period to the same Church, the apostle prays that the Lord would direct their hearts "into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ" (2 Thess. iii. 5), or rather, "the patience of Christ," He waiting in heaven, and we, in fellowship with Him, here on earth.

Nor is this truth confined to Paul. Its doctrinal exposition is not, indeed, found elsewhere, but it is often alluded to as a familiar truth, forming the basis of practical exhortations. Thus Peter says, "The end of all things is at hand ; be ye, therefore, sober and watch unto prayer " (1 Peter iv. 7). "The end of all things " is not death ; and it cannot mean the end of the world, for the end of the world was not at hand. It was an event of the utmost magnitude, as the words import, and at the same time one which might be speedily anticipated. Only one such event is elsewhere spoken of. The Lord's coming is held out as a present expectation, as an incentive to sobriety and watchfulness, and as a transaction of tremendous importance, closing God's present dealings, and bringing in an entirely new order of things. The coming, indeed, is here viewed in its widest sense, including both its parts, but that it is the coming there can be no doubt. And this event is said to be "at hand," and is used as a ground of exhortation to sobriety and prayerfulness.

II. In the above quotations we have seen how this "blessed hope " is constantly employed to enforce holiness and godliness in individual walk. In the same spirit it is further used to enjoin faithfulness in the midst of ecclesiastical corruption. It is the fence God has provided against the evils within the Church, as well as against the evils of the surrounding world. Fearful corruption and wickedness had shown themselves at Thyatira, and judgment was threatened.

But in the midst of the failure were some faithful ones, whom the Lord thus addressed—"But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak, I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have, hold fast till I come" (Rev. ii. 24, 25). The Church at Philadelphia was weak, but was maintaining the truth amidst opposition. To it the Lord writes—"Behold, I come quickly; hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. iii. 11). All around were weakness and wickedness, and the faithful are enjoined to "hold fast" what they have. But till what time? In one case it is said,—“till I come;” in the other—it is implied, and the hope is given—"Behold, I come quickly." Now why name the Lord's coming, if the believers were to look for death, and not the Lord's coming? Where death is meant, it is mentioned. In these very epistles, the Lord writes—"Be thou faithful unto death;" just as when on earth He had told His disciples—"Whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." Death, then, was not what the faithful brethren in Thyatira and Philadelphia were to look for, but another event. And this other event might happen in their lifetime, for how else could they be exhorted to hold fast what they had until it occurred? Or why should they be told that the Lord would come quickly, if it were not meant to cheer their hearts as a present anticipation?

So, too, in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Some of those addressed were in danger of being shaken in the faith. Persecution was at hand, and they had "not yet resisted unto blood." The apostle trembled for the reality of the work in some of their hearts, and warns them most solemnly against apostasy after receiving so much truth and being made partakers of such outward privileges. He earnestly beseeches them—"Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward; for ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise; for yet a little while and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Heb. x. 35-37). A modern preacher would say—"Yet a little while and this scene will close; death will put an end to your troubles, and you will depart to be with Jesus, which is far better." But this is not the language of the Holy Ghost. Why? Because the Holy Ghost, knowing the mind of God, always puts the Lord's coming, and not death, as the expectation of the Christian. This blessed hope was before the Hebrews, and in its cheering light, let them have patience, do the will of God, and look for the certain promise. We are told, too, to "consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. x. 24, 25). Here "the day" is not exactly held out as a hope, but rather as an incentive to



faithfulness. It is the Lord's coming viewed in its whole scope, more than the special prospect of His advent to take the believer to the Father's house. Still, this, as the first part of the coming, was, of course, included, and we again find that this event is spoken of as approaching, as near enough to give point to exhortations urging a line of behaviour suited to the believer under such circumstances.

III. In these last cases the idea of trial and persecution was before the apostle's mind, and the Lord's coming is named in order to strengthen the tried ones against the evil around. But the same hope is also presented to stay the heart against suffering arising from quite different causes. In such a practical epistle as James, no matter of mere curious speculation would enter. Yet here the hope of the Lord's return is brought in to comfort the poor brethren, who were groaning under oppression. "Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord" (Jas. v. 7). If James had meant "unto death," he would have said so. It is manifest that he could not mean the end of the world. He intended, therefore, to point to the Lord's coming as an event that might happen before death, and in the prospect of which they were to find their comfort. This is obvious, also, from the way in which he continues—"Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient ;

stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (ver. 7, 8). Mark how accurate and tender the words of comfort here spoken. The blessed hope is presented, not once, but twice, for the healing of their wounded spirits, and yet they are warned against impatience. Long waiting may be needed, but they are not to lose the hope because of its delay; for, though in man's estimate it might tarry, according to God's Word, "it draweth nigh."

IV. But this hope of Christ's return, however it may be used for warning, for exhortation, or for comfort, derives its chief power from the fact that it is the expression of the true heart's affectionate longing for an absent Lord. The One, "whom, having not seen, we love," is the One for whose return and presence our hearts should long. And it is, therefore, in this aspect that we have the Lord's coming once more placed before us. In the closing chapter of the Apocalypse, "the Spirit and the Bride," that is, the Church—say, "Come;" and our Lord's last words in this book are, "Surely I come quickly," to which the response arises—"Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. xxii. 17-20). To what coming, then, is it that the Lord here alludes? Surely to that which He left behind Him as a legacy of hope to His disciples, when He told them that He went to prepare a place for them, and would come again and take them to Himself; to that with which He linked the writer of this book in those memorable words—"If I will that he tarry

till I come, what is that to thee?" And here I would point out that the language is not that of individual believers, but that of the Church, the Bride, and also of the Spirit. In an individual Christian, it might be urged that it meant a longing for death and to be with Jesus. But such an interpretation is manifestly inadmissible if used by the Spirit and the Bride. Still more forced and unmeaning would such language be in the mouth of the Church, if the coming which it invites were the coming at the end of the world. In this very book the most tremendous catastrophes are foretold, which had certainly not taken place when the book was closed. Yet even then Jesus says, "Behold, I come quickly," and even then the response goes up—"Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus." What can we infer but that the coming of the Lord might legitimately be anticipated before these events occurred? No one, knowing the predictions of Scripture, could have said, "Come, Lord Jesus," if this coming were not to be till after these predictions were fulfilled. The words imply that the event prayed for was one which might happen at any moment, not one which could only take place at the close of a long series of unaccomplished prophecy.

V. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," and if the heart be really full of this prospect, its expectation will make itself known in various unforeseen and casual ways. This is another form in which the hope appears. Thus it is used as a general



basis for appeal. "Now, we beseech you, brethren," says Paul to the Thessalonians, "by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind" (2 Thess. ii. 1, 2). Again, in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, which might seem simply a retrospective act, the same thought of the Lord's coming is presented: "For, as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death *till He come*" (1 Cor. xi. 26). These passages do not, indeed, like others, define the character of the coming, or its speedy occurrence. But they show how constantly it was before the mind of the apostles and the early believers, how it entered into and coloured all their thoughts, words, and actions. No dim general expectation of His advent at the end of the world would account for its introduction in the way in which it is brought in here.

VI. But this coming of the Lord has yet another aspect, which we solemnly urge on those believers who are disposed to treat it as a curious and even frivolous speculation. It is by the contempt and ridicule of this doctrine that the decline of the last days will be especially marked. "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of,

that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water, and in the water; whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished; but the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night" (2 Pet. iii. 3-10).

If the Lord's coming is to believers a blessed hope, to professing Christendom it is the end of hope. It shuts the door of grace, reserving those left behind for the terrible ushering in of the day of the Lord, when He comes to take "vengeance on them that know not God," and for the still darker hour when that day shall close in the conflagration of the world and the judgment of the great white throne. The apostle, speaking of professing Christendom, there foretells that in the last days the Lord's coming will be a subject of derision. Men will point to the world around, declare everything to be prosperous, and discern no sign of change. Alas! they are "willingly ignorant" that so it was before the flood. Did the mockery excited by the

long warning prevent the deluge coming and sweeping the scoffers away? Nor will it stay the execution of judgment on the world in whose stability men are trusting. The delay may seem long, for God's measure of time is not like man's; but the Lord has not forgotten His promise. If He has delayed its fulfilment, it is that the despisers of His grace might be gathered in, not being willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. When the time is arrived, the promise will be fulfilled, and then the terrible day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night for the destruction of those who are left behind.

Is not this scoffing what we see around us? But there is something still sadder in beholding many of the Lord's true children swelling this cry of mocking incredulity, and both in their religious systems, in their political calculations, and in their whole scheme of worldly conduct, asking with like unbelief, or putting aside with like indifference, the solemn question—Where is the promise of His coming?

## CHAPTER III.

### THE COMING OF THE LORD WITH HIS SAINTS.

THE passages cited in the preceding chapters either treat the Lord's return in a general sense, without distinguishing between its two acts, or, in the greater number of instances, describe only the first act, the coming of Jesus *for* His saints. The second act, the return of Jesus *with* His saints, is more frequently spoken of as the "appearing," the "revelation," or the "manifestation" of the Lord, and is not, like the other, a doctrine specially confined to the New Testament. On the contrary, as we shall see more fully at a later stage, this return of Jesus to the earth in glory and power is a theme which occupies a most prominent place in Old Testament teaching, and the only point added in the New Testament, is that, when He thus returns, He will be accompanied by those who have previously been caught up to meet Him in the air. Until the special New Testament hope, the return of Jesus *for* His saints, had been revealed, their return with Him in glory was a feature which could not be made known. My object in this chapter is not to enter into the character or circumstances of this manifestation of Jesus in glory to the earth, but simply to

show that whenever and however it occurs, the saints are manifested with Him, thus proving that they must have been taken up to heaven at a still earlier period.

In the second psalm the return of Jesus is described. The Gentiles are raging, the people imagining a vain thing, the kings and rulers of the earth conspiring against Jehovah and against His Christ. Then it is that the Lord vexes them in His sore displeasure, and declares that in spite of their rage, He has set His king upon Zion, the hill of His holiness. Christ then publishes the decree—"Jehovah hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the Gentiles for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (Ps. ii. 7-9). No passage could on its face bear stronger evidence of God's purpose to establish Christ's dominion on earth by power and judgments. Language less descriptive of the spread of Christian truth, or language more descriptive of the forcible and violent establishment of dominion, could hardly be devised.

But we are not left to conjecture as to how the prediction of this psalm receives its accomplishment. On the contrary, its fulfilment is thus graphically narrated. "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse: and He that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth

judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns ; and He had a name written that no man knew, but He Himself. And He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood : and His name is called the Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations : and *He shall rule them with a rod of iron* : and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God " (Rev. xix. 11-15). The passage then goes on to describe the gathering of the armies of the beast and the false prophet, the capture and fearful doom of the two leaders and the destruction of their followers, the binding and imprisonment of Satan, and the reign of Christ together with His saints for a thousand years. That the One here described is Christ cannot be questioned, and that the work He accomplishes is the same work as that foretold in the second psalm the identity of the language clearly proves. The forcible establishment of Christ's dominion, therefore, and the destructive judgment of His enemies, takes place at least a thousand years before the end of the world. He then comes to the earth in manifested glory and resistless strength to execute the judgments of God and to reign in righteousness over the world.

But there is a feature in this description of His return which does not appear in the corresponding passage in the Psalms. In the Revelation, we find



that He is followed by the armies of heaven, and the question arises—"What are these armies of heaven, and of whom do they consist?" By looking a little further back in the same chapter, we discover something which casts light on this subject. We there find mighty rejoicings going on in heaven—"the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Rev. xix. 6). But the song of joy and thanksgiving does not stop here. This magnificent chorus goes on to praise God, that "the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of saints" (ver. 7, 8). Now the Lamb's wife is, we need hardly say, the Church, which, therefore, is beheld in heaven previous to the sudden and terrible appearance of Christ to execute judgment on the earth. But not only is the Church in heaven; it is also clothed in fine linen, which is the same dress in which the armies of heaven, who follow Jesus, make their appearance shortly afterwards. Nor is this mere coincidence. The fine linen has a peculiar meaning; it is the righteousnesses of saints. Those, therefore, who issue from heaven with Jesus are attired in raiment which has just before been said to be emblematic of the saints' righteousnesses, and surely none could be clothed in such vestures except the saints themselves. The armies of heaven, then,



which follow Jesus, are none others than the saints, who must, therefore, have been previously caught up to be with Him in heaven.

There is another link, however, by which this chain of evidence is rendered still more complete. What we see the saints actually doing in the chapter we have just been considering, is the very thing which is promised to them in an earlier part of the same prophetic book. In addressing the Church at Thyatira, Christ had thus spoken—"He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I received of my Father" (Rev. ii. 26, 27). Thus those who overcome, that is, real believers, as distinguished from false professors, are here joined with Christ Himself in that judgment of the nations foretold in the second psalm. The armies of heaven, then, clothed in a dress emblematic of the righteousnesses of saints, are no other than these overcomers, that is, the true saints, who were before seen to be in heaven. So that believers are taken to heaven before Christ comes to reign, and when He does come, they come with Him, and in His glory.

If it is urged that the book of Revelation is a difficult one, and that its language is highly figurative, I reply that a special blessing is attached to its study, so that the Spirit meant it to be understood. Besides, while admitting that the book contains diffi-

cult passages, there are some portions as easy as any other parts of Scripture, and the texts above cited are plain enough for the simplest reader to comprehend. But, to remove all doubt, it may be well to show how fully its teaching harmonises with other portions of God's Word.

The Epistle of Jude contains a very ancient prophecy uttered by the patriarch Enoch, the seventh from Adam, in which he foretold, "saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints, to execute judgment upon all" (Jude 14, 15). Now there are but two scenes named in Scripture to which this can refer. In one of these, the judgment of the great white throne at the end of the world, there is nothing said about the saints being present. In the other, the coming of Christ to take His earthly dominion, we have already seen that the saints, as the armies of heaven, issue forth with Him, clothed in His likeness, and His companions in executing judgment on His foes. There can, therefore, be no doubt that it is to this event that Enoch's prophecy relates.

In writing to the Thessalonians, Paul says—"The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among

you was believed) in that day" (2 Thess. i. 7-10). Here, again, the scene is not at the end of the world, for then Jesus is seated as a judge, instead of coming forth as a minister of vengeance. And though "His mighty angels" are here named as His companions in executing judgment, the saints are also revealed with Him ; for He is glorified *in* His saints, and admired *in* those who believe—the Thessalonians being thus recompensed for their sufferings and persecutions. In the former letter Paul had spoken of Christ coming "with all His saints" (1 Thess. iii. 13). He now adds that when He comes to take vengeance on the wicked, His saints will be manifested with Him. The manifestation is referred to as a known event, and could only be what he had named in his first letter. The testimony of Thessalonians, therefore, exactly agrees with that of Jude and Revelation.

Romans viii. 18-23, shows that while the believer is "waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body," he has another hope ; "for I reckon," says the apostle, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us." And when is this glory revealed ? We are told in the next verse, "For the earnest expectation of the creature (or creation) waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God," by which it will "be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God." Now this is just the very thing we see in the Apocalypse. There we behold creation groaning under

fearful woes, till Jesus and all the *other* sons of God are manifested in their glory, coming from heaven for its deliverance, destroying "them which destroy the earth," and reigning in peace and happiness for a thousand years. In the Romans, as in the Revelation, the manifestation of the sons of God is in glory, that is, it is not while the believer is groaning in himself, but after the redemption of the body. The first thing to be anticipated, therefore, is the coming of Jesus *for* His saints, when the redemption of the body will be accomplished; and the next His appearing *with* His saints to destroy His enemies, to deliver creation from its bondage, and to establish His dominion over the uttermost parts of the earth.

Again, in another epistle, Paul says, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Col. iii. 3, 4). And John writes in the same strain, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him" (1 John iii. 2). This is not in heaven, for how could Christ's appearing in heaven be spoken of as a future thing? Is it, then, at the end of the world? There is no scripture to show that the believer will appear with Christ at that time. But there is scripture for saying that Christ will be manifested for the deliverance of creation at least a thousand years before the end of the world. And there is scripture for saying that when He is thus manifested believers will be manifested in the same

glory. Why not, then, bow to the authority of God's Word, and accept the interpretation which lets Scripture speak for itself, and in consistency with itself, instead of forcing it to suit our own preconceived notions? Nothing is simpler to follow than the truth of God, if allowed to flow in its own natural bed; nothing more difficult, if diverted into the artificial channels of human theology and tradition.

We now see, then, that Jesus will come to reign before the end of the world, and that when He does come, His saints, including the Church, will come with Him. Thus, while the believer's immediate hope—for which he should be constantly waiting—is the coming of Jesus *for* His saints, another hope is also often mentioned, namely, the coming of Jesus *with* His saints. The first event is generally called the Lord's "coming;" the second His "revelation," "manifestation," or "appearing." But these names are not invariable. Thus Christ "appears" to those who look for Him when He "comes" to take them to Himself; while He "comes" at the time when He "appears" to the world. In most cases, indeed, the nature and object of His coming or appearing are seen by a glance at the context, and do not depend for their proper interpretation on the use of any particular word.

My object, however, is not to look into the nature of this latter act in the Lord's coming, but merely to show that as it long precedes the end of the world, the rapture of the saints, which is still earlier, must also be before the end of the world; thus establishing



by independent evidence, what we have already gathered from other sources, that there is no formidable barrier of unfulfilled prophecy lying between the believer and the consummation of the hope he is so often bidden to cherish. Instead, therefore, of having the expectation of the Lord's return as a distant prospect, with a long series of events intervening, we have it as a present hope, for the realisation of which we may be instantly waiting.

Both of these aspects, or rather parts, of the Lord's coming, are held out as hopes, but there is a difference in the way in which the hope is put forward. The earlier act is generally so named as to show its immediate character; the later, though never regarded as distant, and though expected to produce a present effect, is not spoken of as an event to be momentarily looked for. Again, the coming of the Lord *for* His saints is a hope addressed to the affections, and the appeals founded upon it are rather to the heart than to the interests, as a wife would wish so to order things during her husband's absence, that his return might be a source of unalloyed delight. The coming of the Lord *with* His saints, on the other hand, is the time when faithfulness of walk and service will be manifested in its result, and the appeals founded upon it partake largely of this character, the reward being presented to the mind, as well as the delight of the Lord's own presence.

As the period when the fruits of faithful service will be gathered, it is often spoken of by the apostle

Paul. Thus, looking forward to the results of his labours among the Corinthians, he gives thanks that they are "waiting for the revelation (see margin) of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. i. 7, 8); and he is glad that they have acknowledged him in part, "that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus" (2 Cor. i. 14). Writing to the Philippians, he is confident "that He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ". (Phil. i. 6); he prays that they "may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ" (ver. 10); and trusts "that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain" (ii. 16). So Timothy is charged to keep the commandments laid on him by the apostle, "without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. vi. 14); and in the second epistle, the writer, looking forward to his own approaching martyrdom, says—"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing" (2 Tim. iv. 8).

It is not urged, however, only as the reward of faithfulness in service, but as an incentive to holiness and purity of walk. In this use, the object is so closely analogous to the practical exhortations founded on the expectation of the Lord's coming for His



saints, that the two are sometimes united together. The Colossians being dead with Christ, and having a life "hid with Christ in God," are exhorted to heavenly affections by the assurance that "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Col. iii. 4); and the apostle prays that the Thessalonians may have their hearts stablished, "unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (1 Thess. iii. 13). In these cases only the coming of Jesus with His saints is named, but in others, where the same object is in view, the two parts of the coming are used together. Thus, in the letter to Titus (ii. 13), besides the "blessed hope," the believer has set before him "the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ," as an incentive to the denial of ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to a sober, righteous, and godly life. So, too, in the writings of another apostle, the exhortation to "abide in Him, that when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John ii. 28), is closely associated with the assurance "that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is," followed by the practical moral effect which this truth has on the walk, "every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John iii. 2, 3).

Another use to which this second act in the Lord's coming is applied, is to encourage the believer in the

midst of suffering and persecution, by the contrast of the glory in which he will then be manifested. Thus in writing to the Romans, Paul tells them that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us" (viii. 18), and in another epistle he says—"If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. ii. 12). Peter also encourages those to whom he writes by showing them "how the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ;" and urges them to "gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. i. 7, 13).

In all these cases, the hope, though different from that of the Lord's immediate return for His saints, is closely connected with it, and absolutely dependent upon it, for the believer cannot be manifested with Christ when He comes to reign on earth, unless he has first been caught up to be with Him in glory. It is only as establishing this truth that we now refer to it, reserving its character and results as regards the world and God's purposes concerning it, for consideration at a later stage.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE TEACHING OF OUR LORD'S PARABLES CONCERNING HIS COMING.

DURING our Lord's ministry, the time for disclosing the mystery of His separate advent for His saints was not arrived, and in His parables the two parts of the coming are spoken of without distinction. His words were to be interpreted by the Holy Ghost, sent after His departure, and it is in the light of the truth thus given that His parables must be understood.

In Matthew, we read of a "servant whom his Lord made ruler over his household to give them meat in due season." It is said, "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him off and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. xxiv. 45-51).

This is followed by the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, the wise virgins who "took oil in their vessels with their lamps" going in with the bridegroom to the marriage, while the foolish virgins, who "took no oil with them," when they come, after the door is shut, and entreat, "Lord, Lord, open to us," are told in answer, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not" (Matt. xxv. 1-12). This leads to the practical exhortation—"Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour." The rest of the verse given in our Bible is unauthorised.

In Luke, the following exhortation is given—"Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord when he will return from the wedding, that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching; verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants" (Luke xii. 35-38). This is followed by the parable of the steward, the same in all essential particulars as in the Gospel of Matthew. In Mark, the exhortations to watch are most solemnly given, but the teaching on this subject does not add to that of the two other synoptical gospels.

All the parables just named represent persons awaiting the arrival of another. The One expected is Christ.

But what is the time of the coming looked forward to? It cannot be the end of the world, for all modes of prophetic interpretation insert a period of a thousand years following our Lord's ministry before that time, and no exhortation could be given to watch for an event known to be a thousand years off. A more usual and probable explanation is that our Lord speaks of the hour of death. But death is not elsewhere described in any such terms. The good man goes to be with Jesus, or is seen in Abraham's bosom. The bad man's soul is required of him, or he is found in Hades. Each goes to his own place; or if either is taken, he is "carried by angels," not by Christ coming for him. But besides this, in these parables, the Lord always comes "in a day when he looketh not for Him, and at an hour when he is not aware." Now this is not usually the case with death, which, more frequently than not, advances with full warning of its approach. Moreover, the whole tone of the parables implies a great public event, such as the coming of the Lord named in the epistles, not a mere matter of private moment like the death of individuals.

It is, then, the Lord's coming that is here spoken of, but its two parts are not distinguished. They form portions of a whole, and are so represented, the different times at which different events occur not being noted. Some receive reward, others punishment, and whether these begin when the Lord comes *for* His saints, or when He comes *with* them, is immaterial to the object of the parable.

The moral purpose of the parables is the same as the references to the Lord's coming in the epistles. While the steward watches he is vigilant and sober ; when he says in his heart, "My Lord delayeth his coming," he begins to beat his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink and be drunken. How like Paul's teaching,—*"The night is far spent, the day is at hand ; let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof"* (Rom. xiii. 12-14). In both cases, watching for the Lord is the incentive to faithfulness, while unwatchfulness leads to carelessness of walk, indulgence of lust, and worldliness of heart.

In the parable of the virgins, we have the same point, but the condition of welcoming the bridegroom is also shown. Watching virgins should be awake and should have oil in their lamps. All fail in the first ; as the Church did for ages lose sight of the hope of the Lord's coming. But there is a difference in the other matter, the possession of oil ; some having the Spirit, that is, being real believers, others only false professors. Before the cry is raised, these classes mingle together ; but when it is heard, they divide. This shows that the expectation of the Lord's return is not only the spring of individual purity of walk, but the source of holy separateness, and care for the honour of Christ, in the assembly. In all ages there have been Christians with oil in their



vessels, but till the cry of the bridegroom's coming was raised, they slept carelessly in company with mere empty professors, and it is the expectation of the bridegroom's arrival which causes them to part fellowship.

In the parable of the servants waiting for their Lord's return from the wedding, the same general lesson of watchfulness is inculcated, but another element of great importance is added, in the caution given as to the uncertainty and possible distance of the time ; "and if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants." What is this but an intimation that, while the watch ought to be constant, it *might* be protracted ? As the intimation to John, and the language addressed to the Thessalonians, required watchfulness from the first, this parable warns us against relaxing our watchfulness, or growing careless because the expected advent has not yet taken place. In the Epistle of James, though the sufferers are exhorted to look for the Lord's coming, they are told that the watch may require "long patience." So here ; but the blessing of faithfulness is all the greater. Carelessness in watching is as earnestly deprecated, and the reward of diligence as emphatically stated, in the third watch as in the first, in the nineteenth century as in the apostolic days.

The object of the parables, then, is just the same as that of the teaching concerning the Lord's coming contained in the epistles. We shall see the same

thing if we look at the rewards. In the case of the steward who acts faithfully, he is made ruler over all that his lord hath. Here the joint-heirship is shadowed forth, "if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him." In the parable of the virgins, the blessing is different, the wise virgins entering in with the bridegroom to the marriage feast; while in the case of the servants found watching for their master after he returns from the wedding, they sit down to meat, and the Lord comes forth and serves them. The figure in the two parables differs, and the reward differs to suit it. But the principle is the same, and agrees with the "blessed hope" of the epistles, to be for ever with the Lord, in His presence, and partakers of His joys, the objects of His watchful love and unfailing delight. How beautiful the fitness of our Lord's teaching down to the minutest detail! Where it is the heart watching for the Lord's return, the reward is the joy of the Lord's communion, the blessed society of the Father's house. Where it is the service of patient waiting, the Lord Himself owns it in service to the faithful ones. Where it is careful watching over the Lord's interests, the suited response is, to be made rulers in the kingdom.

Looking at the punishment, the same is seen. The unfaithful steward is cut off. At the time of the Lord's coming *for* His saints he is left behind, no longer as a steward, but as one under judgment, which is executed when Christ comes with His saints and the angels of His power, "taking vengeance on them

that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." In the case of the virgins, all that is said is that they are shut out, that is, they are not taken up to be with Christ when He comes for His own. In both the rewards and the punishments, no note is made of the difference of time between the two acts of the Lord's coming, merely the results being stated, in exact accordance with what the epistles teach, but without reference to the period of their realisation.

There is one common feature to be noted in all these parables. The same servants who are bidden to watch are those who welcome their Lord: the same steward who receives his master's charge is found in possession and rewarded or punished. There is nothing about a succession of servants, a succession of stewards, or a succession of virgins. Surely there is a reason for this. Our Lord would have our affections so occupied with Himself that the brightest hope of our hearts is His return, and therefore, here, as in the epistles, He holds it out as a hope which may be delayed, but which should always be present. Let us search our own heart, and ask whether the reason why this hope is so dim and unreal to us, is not the coldness of our love towards our absent Lord, leaving room in the heart for worldly objects and worldly affections.

And now, in this and preceding chapters, we have heard the testimony of the Holy Ghost as contained

in almost every book of the New Testament. The few exceptions, in which no reference to this subject is made, are the two smaller Epistles of John and the Epistle to Philemon—all short personal letters on matters of immediate interest, and not in any way entering into the discussion or statement of doctrinal questions; and the larger and more important Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians. It may be well to inquire the reason for the omission in these last letters. In writing to the Galatians the apostle is occupied exclusively with vindicating the sufficiency of the work of Christ against those who were seeking to bring in Jewish ordinances. It is an argumentative epistle addressed solely to this point, and no reference to higher truths was suitable to the low condition into which the Galatian Churches had fallen. In the Epistle to the Ephesians the reason is different. The believer is there regarded according to God's purposes, as having a common standing with Christ, quickened with Him, raised with Him, accepted in Him, and seated in heavenly places in Him. In other words, he is seen as having already attained the goal to which the coming of the Lord will eventually bring him. It is not, therefore, presented as a doctrinal truth; and when we come to the practical part of the epistle, we find that here, as elsewhere, it flows out of the doctrinal, that is, the conduct is to be conformed to the relationship in which the believer is set. This relationship is that of union with Christ, membership of His body, part

of "the fulness of Him who filleth all in all." And it would manifestly mar the beautiful image thus presented, if the coming of the Lord were brought in to complete that which according to God's purpose, as here unfolded, is complete already.

What, then, does the testimony of the Holy Ghost, thus largely scattered over the New Testament Scriptures, teach us? It teaches us that our Lord promised to return for His disciples, and held this out as so real and present a hope, that when asked about what should become of one of them, His only direction was that he should look for His coming. It teaches us that death, as the penalty for sin, no longer exists for believers, and that the apostle in two places, where speaking of living saints being changed and taken to Jesus, uses the first person, implying the possibility that those then upon the earth might be among the number. It teaches us that the Lord's return is constantly described as "drawing nigh," as "at hand," as "coming quickly," or by other expressions which import its speedy occurrence, possibly within the lifetime of those addressed; and that believers, instead of being told to wait for death, are constantly exhorted to wait for the Lord's coming, in a way which would be wholly misleading were this event not intended to be held before them as one always imminent. It teaches us that delay is not to cause the disciple to relax his vigilance, and that the attitude of constant expectation leads to faithfulness in service and carefulness in walk. It teaches us that another



event, also occupying a large place in Scripture, and described as the appearing or revelation of Christ, an event long preceding the destruction of the globe—will not take place till after the saints have been caught up to be with Jesus in heaven, and that when this event occurs the translated saints will be manifested with Him, the sharers of His glory, and the companions of His rule. Finally, it teaches us that this hope, instead of being regarded as a fanciful theory, was constantly before the minds of the primitive disciples, and that in nearly all their writings the inspired authors of the New Testament alluded to it as familiar to their readers, and as exercising such an influence over them that it could be used as the basis for appeals, for comfort, for exhortation, for purity of walk, for separation from the world, and for heavenly affections.

We would ask believers whether their own hopes and expectations are based on this foundation, and if not, we would solemnly and earnestly inquire, on what do they rest? Does this “blessed hope,” held out before the earliest believers, and still given as the bright beacon for the Christian’s gaze, agree with the expectation constantly cherished, of the gradual improvement and ultimate conversion of the world by the preaching of Christ? How could believers be told to be waiting in present expectation of an event which could not happen until the world was converted? If they were to expect the taking up of all living believers at any moment, they could not expect the



previous conversion of the world. And if they were to anticipate the previous conversion of the world, they could not be in the waiting attitude befitting servants who looked for the coming of their Lord. We shall presently see how utterly destitute of Scripture foundation is the commonly received tradition of the world's conversion to Christianity by the preaching of the gospel. At present I only point out its inconsistency with the immediate hope of the Lord's return, which we have shown to be the teaching of the Word of God, and the expectation of the early believers.

Again I would ask, with all earnestness and affection, whence are your hopes derived? If drawn from God's Word, they may be postponed, but can never be confounded. If from any other source—from reason, from desire, from experience, from tradition—from anything, in fact, but the sure Word of the living God—they are but delusions and snares, from which you can receive nothing but miserable disappointment. God's ways are not as our ways, and if we seek to discover them by the light of our own wisdom, instead of from the unfailing record of His Word, we shall only be "blind leaders of the blind," deceiving ourselves with flattering hopes, and unconsciously misleading others, perhaps to their destruction.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE RETURN OF JESUS FOR BELIEVERS WHO HAVE “FALLEN ASLEEP.”

WE have now examined the testimony of Scripture with respect to the Lord's return, and have seen that it is held out as a present hope before the living believer, who will, when it occurs, “be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” and be caught up “to meet the Lord in the air.” But it may be objected that already nearly sixty generations of Christians are in their graves, and that a hope which could only disappoint so vast a majority of believers, could never really have been held out by the Holy Ghost. To this objection, there are, however, two simple answers.

First, The delay, long as it is, has not mocked the hopes of believers. The first generation of Christians doubtless cherished it, but were never authorised by the language of the Holy Ghost to build upon its happening in their time. They were to be waiting for it as a thing that *might* take place, not counting on it as a thing that *must* take place. They were to be so living in hope of it, that they would not be surprised if it occurred ; not to be so confidently dating it that

they would be disappointed if it did not occur. This was the attitude in which believers stood in apostolic days. After apostolic days, the decline in all truth was fearfully rapid, and among other things, the present expectation of the Lord's return was altogether lost. The Church became like the unfaithful steward, and then the grace of God was shown in putting off this day, which, from declining affection to the person of Christ, was no longer the object of its hopes. When the hope was once lost, the deferring of its fulfilment was not a disappointment. It would be treading on too sacred ground to speculate how far the unfaithfulness of the Church contributed to the delay which has taken place. But we can at all events see that, when such unfaithfulness has been shown, the Church is not entitled to plead the delay as a reason for discrediting the promise, but is rather bound to take the place of confession that she has so long neglected it, and of thanksgiving that the Lord did not come while she was slumbering in forgetfulness or unbelief.

Secondly, The objection above stated proceeds on the assumption that believers who have fallen asleep have no part in this hope. But this is not the case. For though the immediate character of the hope is most strikingly illustrated by the fact that it is constantly presented to the living, yet the Lord has not left us in ignorance of the blessed lot reserved for the believing dead. We shall find that they have just as much interest and participation in this glorious event as believers "who are alive and remain ;" and surely

this is another proof of the Lord's goodness, in having so long delayed His return. Being now absent from the body and present with the Lord, the believing dead are doubtless sharers of His hopes, and in the waiting condition which, from the loss of this precious truth, they failed to assume here on earth. Thus, the wisdom of God has brought it about that, though the vast majority of believers have been unfaithful in this matter, yet the Lord's return, instead of coming as an unwelcome surprise, will be in fulfilment of the cherished hopes, and in answer to the expectant attitude of most, if not all, of those who have an interest in it. The most careless observer must be aware how widely this "blessed hope" has revived among the Lord's people of late years. And so, whenever the shout is raised, the myriads of believers whose spirits are already with the Lord, and many, perhaps all, of those still on earth, will be longingly expecting His advent.

The love of Jesus beautifully shows itself in His desire to make His chosen ones participators in His own hopes and delights. He loves to have our hearts. He would have us behold the glories which we cannot share, for He counts upon and values our fellowship. "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, *that they may behold My glory which Thou hast given Me*" (John xvii. 24). So at the Lord's Supper, He desires believers, not to recall the blessings derived from Him—but to "do this in remembrance of ME." In like manner as to His coming, He has given it as a hope for their hearts,

which He would have them cherish in fellowship with Himself, and in grace and love He has delayed this event, until not only the generations which lost it on earth, have regained it in heaven, but also the hope has been revived in living power among the members of His body still dwelling in the world.

We shall proceed, then, to examine the teaching of Scripture as to the effect of the Lord's coming on believers who have fallen asleep. "I would not have you ignorant, brethren," says the apostle Paul, "concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (anticipate) them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. iv. 13-18). There is a peculiar significance in the expression, "This we say unto you by the word of the Lord." The apostle Paul had received special revelations given to no other man. Thus he says, in writing to the Corinthian Church about the Lord's Supper, not that he had



learnt the mode of its observance from those present at its institution, but "I have received of the Lord, that which also I delivered unto you" (1 Cor. xi. 23). Again, he writes to the Ephesians, speaking of the mystery which God had entrusted to him,—“By revelation He made known unto me the mystery which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men” (Eph. iii. 3-5). It is only on subjects of great importance, subjects worthy of a special revelation of God’s mind, that such language is adopted. A passage, therefore, thus prefaced, like the one we are now considering, is, so to speak, emphasised by the Holy Ghost, as demanding more than usual consideration.

What, then, is the truth thus peculiarly commended to our notice? Our Lord’s own words had already taught the disciples that He might return at any moment, and that when He did so, living believers would be taken to be with Him. But they were as yet ignorant of what would happen to those who had “fallen asleep in Christ.” They looked for a resurrection, and doubted not that believers dying in the Lord would be saved. Like Martha, they thought that the believing dead would “rise again in the resurrection at the last day,” and, like her, failed to apprehend the deep meaning hid in those words—“I am the resurrection and the life.” The key to these words was now to be furnished by the apostle Paul, speaking in a special manner “by the word of the Lord.” He found the Thessalonians sorrowing over the dead as those



“not having hope.” This does not mean that they had any doubt as to the ultimate salvation of their deceased friends. But having no revelation as to what would become of dead believers at the Lord’s return, they feared that by death they had lost the special hope of being taken up by the Lord to be with Himself, and to share the glories of His appearing. This apprehension it was that filled the survivors with grief. The yet unrevealed truth of what should happen to the dead saints at Christ’s coming was, therefore, the important communication given “by the word of the Lord” to the apostle Paul to make known to these mourners. It is the completion of the hope held out by the Lord Himself while here on earth.

Its tenor was simple. The Thessalonians had supposed that while they would be taken to be with Jesus at His coming, their deceased relatives would be left in the grave till “the resurrection at the last day.” The apostle declares to them “by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall NOT prevent” (the old word for anticipate) “them which are asleep.” On the contrary, these dead should be raised first. “For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise FIRST: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up TOGETHER WITH THEM in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. iv. 16, 17). The whole scene is momentary, but its order is, first the

raising of the sleeping believers, and next the catching up of the living and the raised saints together to meet the Lord.

There is a very close correspondence between the truth here announced and the mystery made known to the Corinthians. "Behold I show you a mystery ; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump ; for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed " (1 Cor. xv. 51, 52). This is manifestly "the redemption of the body," and the transformation "into the likeness of Christ's glorious body" of which we have already spoken as the hope of living believers. It is also the same event as that described in the Epistle to the Thessalonians. In both the trumpet sounds ; in both the dead saints are raised ; in both, at the same moment, God's power is manifested towards the living saints—in the Corinthians fashioning them into the likeness of Christ, in the Thessalonians catching them up to be with Christ. But these two actions are simultaneous—as John says, "We shall be like Him, *for* we shall see Him as He is " (1 John iii. 2).

These passages are usually understood as referring to a general resurrection at the end of the world. Against this view there are, however, several conclusive objections.

FIRST, The resurrection here spoken of is at the

same time as the coming of the Lord for believers. The text in Thessalonians proves that the living saints are to be caught up together with those who are raised ; and the passage in Corinthians shows that the changing of the living saints and the raising of the dead will all be “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” But the Scriptures set forth the return of the Lord for His living saints as a present hope, for which they are bidden to be continually waiting. And here we see that the hope is exactly the same for the dead. In order, then, that its present character might not be lost sight of, even with respect to the dead, the Holy Ghost, with the accuracy always marking Scripture language, has taken care that in both passages where the resurrection of the dead and the rapture of the living saints are named together, the living saints should be spoken of in the first person, so as to show that the event was one which might be looked for in their own day.

SECONDLY, The account given of this resurrection is quite different from the resurrection at the end of the world, which is thus depicted by the apostle John—“And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away ; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God ; and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged out of those things which were

written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and Hades delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged, every man according to his works. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire; this is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. xx. 11-15). This solemn scene is at the end of the world, but it is entirely different in every point from the resurrection previously spoken of. In the one, the living are caught up; in the other, only the dead are mentioned, and no living person could be there, for the earth has fled away. Paul names no judgment whatever; John says that "they were judged, every man according to their works." The dead described in the epistles go to be "for ever with the Lord;" the only doom spoken of with respect to the dead named in the Apocalypse is that they were "cast into the lake of fire." The two accounts, then, are evidently not two different descriptions of the same scene, but descriptions of two different scenes, bearing no resemblance either in character or detail.

THIRDLY, The Word of God never speaks of one general resurrection at the end of the world, but expressly declares that there are two distinct resurrections, one at the end of the world, and one a thousand years before it. The difference already noted between the resurrection of believers mentioned by Paul, and the

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resurrection at the final judgment described in the Revelation, will have prepared the way for this statement. But as it is in opposition to traditional creeds, and forms an important branch of the subject we are examining, it will be well to inquire into the matter somewhat more fully in another chapter.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE FIRST RESURRECTION.

WE have seen that the saints will return with Jesus when He comes forth to destroy His enemies. After judgment has been executed, and Satan cast into the bottomless pit, the reign of Christ, and of certain others begins. "And I saw thrones," says the apostle, "and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them; and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God, and [of those] which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. *But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.* THIS IS THE FIRST RESURRECTION. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Rev. xx. 4-6).

It seems incredible that the zeal for traditional belief, should have led men so far to pervert Scripture



as to maintain, that this "first resurrection" is not a resurrection of persons at all, but of principles—principles "beheaded for the witness of Jesus!"—principles which refuse to worship the beast!—principles, with foreheads and hands on which they decline to receive a mark!—principles, on which "the second death hath no power," but which "shall be priests of God and of Christ!" According to the same system, "the rest of the dead" must be principles too; so that we have no resurrection of persons at all!

What, then, does this passage, intelligently looked at, teach us? First, it shows a resurrection which takes place before the thousand years of Christ's reign; and next, it enables us to learn who are the persons then raised. Three classes are named; the first are called "they"—(I saw thrones and *they* sat on them). With the others we are not at present concerned. Who, then, are those in this first class? They are "blessed and holy," so they must be saints. But what saints? The persons last named are the armies of heaven, who came forth with Jesus to make war. They are the partners of His triumph, and as victors we should expect to see them sharing His dominion. They are the only persons mentioned in the context, moreover, to whom the description could refer. But these armies of heaven are, as we saw, the saints who have before been taken to be with Jesus. The Scriptures, before examined, have shown us, that the saints living when the Lord comes, will be changed into His likeness and caught up into His presence, after which

they will issue forth with Him to judge the world. This scripture shows us that the dead saints also, who are raised when the living are translated, will come in Christ's train and rule in His company.

The passages quoted in our former chapters fully bear out this conclusion. None of these make the glory of the believer to depend on his living till the Lord's return. The apostles were to sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel ; yet Peter, whose question drew forth this announcement, was warned that he himself should suffer death. Believers are made joint-heirs with Christ ; saints are told that they shall judge the world ; sufferers with Christ are promised that they shall reign with Him, irrespective of their being alive or in the tomb at His return. The promise to the saints at Thyatira—"He that overcometh, and keepeth My words unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations"—could not be fulfilled to them, unless the dead shared this hope with the living. Indeed the passage so often referred to, seems written to prove the absolute identity between the lot of believers, whether quick or dead, when Christ comes for His saints. "Them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him" (1 Thess. iv. 14). Bring where, and for what? Bring forth as the sharers of His glory ; for which purpose He will first raise them from their sleep, and take them, with the living believers, to be with Him in heaven.

Our Lord names two kinds of resurrection, though

He says nothing of their being separate in time. "The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment" (John v. 28, 29). Does not the resurrection of life correspond exactly with the resurrection in which they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years? And is not the resurrection of judgment the same as that in which the dead are "judged out of those things which were written in the books?" If so—and surely it would be impossible to call it in question—they are not only distinct in character, but in time; the one being the resurrection of the "dead in Christ" when He comes for His saints, the other the resurrection of "the rest of the dead" which takes place at the end of the world.

Though it seems unnecessary to accumulate evidence upon a point so clear, we would call in aid an expression of Scripture often heedlessly uttered. That a "resurrection *from* the dead" differs from a "resurrection *of* the dead" is, owing to our constant confusion of the phrases, little understood. Everybody would see the difference between speaking of "the departure *of* a company" and the "departure *from* a company." The first implies the departure of the whole assembly; the second of one or more persons out of the assembly. This is just the difference between a "resurrection *of* the dead," and a "resurrec-

tion *from* the dead." "The dead" is the whole company of dead persons. A "resurrection of the dead" simply means that dead persons are raised. But a "resurrection from the dead" means that one or more persons are raised from amongst this company of "the dead." So the phrase is invariably used in Scripture. Most frequently it is applied to the resurrection of Jesus. It is used also, however, of the resurrection of Lazarus (John xii. 1, 9); the suspected resurrection of John the Baptist (Mark vi. 16); the resurrection of the poor beggar, which the rich man entreated for (Luke xvi. 31); and the resurrection of Isaac, which Abraham believed that God was able to accomplish (Heb xi. 19),—all resurrections of a single person from among the mass of the dead. The phrase can grammatically mean nothing but an exclusive resurrection. In nearly all cases where it is used, an exclusive resurrection is evidently intended. Surely, then, we may infer that in the one or two passages where this exclusiveness is not obvious from the connection, the expression still has the same force.

One of these passages is Christ's answer to the Sadducees when they sought to perplex Him about the resurrection. He replies (the answer in Mark is similar), "They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that *age* (not world), and the *resurrection from the dead*, neither marry nor are given in marriage; neither can they die any more, for they are equal unto the angels, and are the children of God, being

the children of the resurrection" (Luke xx. 35, 36). Here the expression used is resurrection *from* the dead, and does the passage imply a general or an exclusive resurrection? It cannot be a general resurrection, for all those who have part in it are like the angels, are the children of God, are counted worthy to obtain it, and die no more. It must be an exclusive resurrection, then, and observe how it corresponds morally with the "first resurrection," about which it is said that those who have part in it are "blessed and holy," beyond the power of "the second death," and priests of God and of Christ. What, then, is the "age" which these "children of the resurrection" are counted worthy to obtain? Here, again, we see the accuracy of Scripture, for surely this age can only be the period of a thousand years during which they live and reign with Christ.

Again, we read that the Sadducees were grieved that the apostles "preached through Jesus, the resurrection from the dead" (Acts iv. 2). The expression is "in Jesus," and no doubt the resurrection of Jesus Himself was the great subject of the apostles' testimony. But the expression implies something more than the resurrection of Jesus Himself. The apostles preached "through (or in) Jesus the resurrection from among the dead." A few weeks before, the Sadducees had asked Jesus a question meant to turn the resurrection into ridicule, and had been silenced by the answer we looked at in our last paragraph, an answer revealing not only the fact of a resurrection, but also an



exclusive resurrection of those who should be counted worthy to obtain it. This is the doctrine which the apostles were now proclaiming, with the further truth that this resurrection was through, or in, that same Jesus whom these Sadducees had rejected. They might have been grieved at their preaching "the resurrection *of* the dead," but could hardly have laid hands on them, inasmuch as the Pharisees, a far more numerous sect than themselves, held the same faith. It was the exclusive resurrection, announced by Jesus, and now proclaimed through Him, that aroused their fury and persecution. In like manner Paul speaks of Jesus as "the first-born from the dead" (Col. i. 18), that is, as the first of those who were taken from amongst the dead. If the resurrection of all the other dead was to be simultaneous, he would not be the first, but the only one, "born from among the dead," the rest having no part in a resurrection "*from* the dead," but merely in a resurrection "*of* the dead."

There is, however, another expression used by the apostle Paul still more remarkable. He desires to be made conformable to Christ's death, "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from among the dead" (Phil. iii. 11). Our translators have merely given "of the dead," because, not knowing anything of the first resurrection, they could not understand the word invented by the apostle to express his meaning. This word, however, is not the word ordinarily used for resurrection, but a word coined for this



passage, never elsewhere found, and literally meaning "resurrection from the midst of." If it merely implied a general resurrection, why should the apostle be at any pains to attain to that to which good and bad alike must come? Or why should he coin a special word to imply exclusiveness when no exclusiveness was meant? But if he meant an exclusive resurrection of persons counted worthy to obtain it, both the force of the expression and the object of the apostle become obvious.

It may be said—if this is the meaning of the phrase "resurrection from the dead," why is it not used with reference to the dead spoken about in the long argument on the resurrection contained in 1 Cor. xv? The reason is very plain. A "resurrection from among the dead" is also a "resurrection of the dead," so that the latter expression may be employed with as much propriety of the first resurrection as of the second. How, then, should we expect to have the two phrases used? Why, surely we should expect that when the object in view was to bring out the exclusive character of the resurrection, the first expression—"resurrection from among the dead"—would be employed. But when the object was to bring out, not the exclusive character of the resurrection, but merely the fact, the latter expression—"resurrection of the dead"—would be more natural. Now the whole argument in the chapter referred to is to show that believers will rise again. This some of the Corinthians were denying. The apostle

replies by stating God's plan, partly executed already, about the first resurrection. His teaching has no reference whatever to the resurrection of unbelievers, and the question of exclusive or general resurrection with respect to believers is not, therefore, touched upon. Nothing save the order and character of God's designs concerning the first resurrection is treated of; while these are very fully set forth. Christ is the first-fruits; then, "they that are Christ's, at His coming" (ver. 23), and at the same time even those believers who have not slept will be changed, and death will be swallowed up in victory (ver. 51-54).

Looked at in this light, the accuracy of the language is very striking. The only dead named or contemplated in the chapter are Jesus Himself and believers in Him. The raising of Jesus, then, being before the others, is described as a "resurrection from among the dead" (ver. 12, 20). The raising of the believers, who comprise the whole of the remaining dead under consideration, is *not* described as a "resurrection from among the dead," but simply as a "resurrection of the dead" (ver. 21, 42). For in this last case the use of the expression "resurrection of the dead" was quite sufficient to bring out the truth which the Holy Ghost is teaching; while the other expression, "resurrection from among the dead," would not only have added nothing to the doctrine unfolded, but would have confused it by the introduction of a foreign and incongruous element.

On the other hand, if bad and good are raised

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together for judgment, how is it that not a word is said about either the wicked dead or the judgment? The omission is surely most powerfully suggestive.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A GENERAL RESURRECTION AND JUDGMENT AT THE END OF THE WORLD, NOT TAUGHT IN SCRIPTURE.

CONCLUSIVE as the passages quoted in our last chapter may appear as to the doctrine of a separate resurrection of believers before the end of the world, it would be a source of confusion to many, so long as there are various other portions of the Word of God which they have always understood as teaching the doctrine which these scriptures seem to overthrow. There are certain passages which have been commonly received as proving the fact of a general resurrection and judgment at the close of the world, and should the ordinary interpretation of these passages be correct, it manifestly clashes with the doctrine we have deduced in our last chapters with reference to an exclusive resurrection of the "dead in Christ." I propose, then, to examine these portions in detail. For there can be no real contradiction in Scripture, and if guided by the Spirit, we shall see either that the passages already quoted have been misunderstood, or that the texts taken to establish the opposite doctrine are in perfect harmony with them.

I. One of these cited as proving a general resurrection is in the prophecies of Daniel. "At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people ; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time : and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament ; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. xii. 1-3). We need not here discuss the meaning of this passage. It is sufficient to point out that, if it refers to a resurrection of the dead at all, it cannot be a general resurrection. The verses quoted are the conclusion of a communication made to Daniel, explaining the events which must happen before the restoration and glory of Daniel's people, that is, the Jews (Dan. x. 19—xii. 4). It relates simply to the Jews, and the time named is not the end of the world, but the deliverance of the nation. The resurrection spoken of, therefore, whether literal or figurative, is *not* at the end of the world, but long before it ; is *not* general, but confined to Daniel's people ; and is *not* applied even to the whole of Daniel's people, but only to many of them. Anything more unlike a general resurrection at the end of the world,

it would be impossible to conceive. Indeed, if accepted as meaning a literal resurrection of the dead at all, it would be one of the most conclusive proofs that the resurrection was partial and previous to the end of the world, instead of universal and at the end of the world.

II. Another passage thought to teach a general resurrection and judgment is the parable of the wheat and the tares. The text supposed to contain this doctrine is as follows:—"Let both (wheat and tares) grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn" (Matt. xiii. 30). The explanation follows. "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the *age* (not world), and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this *age*. The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (ver. 37-43).



That this passage has been supposed to describe a general judgment at the end of the world, is partly the cause and partly the consequence of the unfortunate mistranslation of the word signifying "age," as if it meant "world." The completion of the age is, however, a totally different event from the end of the world, and nothing but error can arise from confounding things so entirely opposed in character. It was a phrase well understood by the Jews, as describing the termination of their own subjection to the Gentiles and disowning of God—the time concerning which Daniel's inquiries had been made and his prophecies uttered. It is always so used by the disciples, as when they inquire, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the age?" Nor is there a single instance where it can be properly understood as referring to the end of the world. On the contrary, it is the beginning of another epoch, by far the most blessed and glorious in the world's history.

But it is not merely the phrase used which forbids us to interpret the event here described as happening at the end of the world. If this is the general resurrection, why is nothing whatever said about anybody rising? Surely the omission of this most striking portion of the picture is proof enough that the scene here presented is not the final resurrection and judgment, but some altogether different event.

What, then, is this event? If we look at what we have seen to be the effect of the Lord's coming, we shall have no difficulty in recognising the exact corre-

spondence between this parable and the things which will happen at that time. The moment had not yet arrived for making known the secret of His coming for His saints before His manifestation to the world. Moreover, the question here is one of outward display to the world, not of dwelling with Christ in the Father's house. Looked at in this light, what have we learned about the Lord's coming? That as far as the wicked are concerned, Christ will come in flaming fire, taking vengeance, and accompanied by the angels of His power; that, as far as believers are concerned, they will be publicly manifested with Him in glory, that He may be "glorified in His saints" and "admired in all them that believe." In the parable, the angels are the ministers of judgment, the righteous shine forth as the sun, and the wicked are cast into a furnace of fire. Can any one fail to perceive the resemblance between the parable and the doctrinal statement?

III. Another passage supposed to contain a description of a general resurrection and judgment at the end of the world, is the last two sections of our Lord's discourse with His disciples in Matthew xxiv. and xxv. The former (xxv. 14-30), shows Jesus as the master who returns after being absent, and demands an account from his servants of certain talents entrusted to them. The second (ver. 31-46) represents Him seated on the throne of His glory, and judging the nations. The question is whether either or both of

these scenes are figures of a general judgment on those raised from their graves at the end of the world.

The first remark that occurs is, that the two scenes are so different in their character that it is not easy to regard them as representations of the same event. In the first parable, the persons spoken of are dealt with individually; in the second, in two great masses. In the first, the question tried is faithfulness to a certain trust; in the second, it is the conduct pursued towards a set of persons called "these my brethren."

But another remark speedily suggests itself. Why should these events be supposed to happen at a general resurrection and at the end of the world, when not so much as a passing allusion is made either to the dead, or to a resurrection, or to the world having come to its closing hour? The only answer that can be given to this question is, that the ordinary interpretation of Scripture left the interpreters no choice. Assuming that Christ only comes at the end of the world, and that all will then be raised and judged, these scenes must happen at that period, for there is no other time at which they could happen. But those who have already learnt that Christ will come before the end of the world, will hesitate to add so enormous a fact as a general resurrection to a narrative in which Scripture has remained wholly silent about it, and will seek some other explanation demanding no such outrage on the Word of God.

The parable of the talents follows those of the steward and of the virgins. The parable of the steward shows

the results of carefulness or carelessness in watching for the Lord's return; that of the virgins the necessity of having oil in the lamp, that is, true spiritual life. The parable of the talents shows the responsibility of those called by the name of Christ to be diligent in His service. As the unwatchful steward is cut off, and the careless virgins are shut out, so here the unprofitable servant is cast into outer darkness, while the diligent ones enter into the joy of their lord. All three parables are fulfilled at the coming of Christ, looked at in both its aspects. The watchful steward, the virgins with oil, and the diligent servants, all receive their reward, while false professors are detected and left behind, or consigned to the dreadful judgments that overtake the world when Christ appears in His glory. While, then, this parable entirely fails as a description of a general resurrection, it perfectly agrees with the rest of Scripture as a picture of what takes place at Christ's second coming.

There is another point of agreement that deserves notice. In Luke the same parable is related, but a difference is shown in the rewards. The servant who has made ten talents becomes ruler over ten cities; he who has made five, over five (Luke xix. 12-26). Do we ever hear of saints being made rulers over cities in heaven? No, but we do hear of saints reigning with Christ over the earth, and to such a state of things the reward in the parable is exactly suited. The picture, then, agrees with other portions of the Word in describing what will happen at the Lord's second

coming, believers being first caught up, and afterwards manifested with Christ in power, each rewarded according to the measure of his faithfulness, and unbelievers being cast out and brought to judgment.

It may be asked whether, if this is the case, such a dialogue could occur as that related in the parable? But a parable is not a history—only a fictitious narrative meant to illustrate a principle. The dialogue is part of the figure, bringing out man's natural reasoning on one side and God's thoughts on the other. Who would understand literally the entreaty of the foolish virgins, or the reply of the bridegroom? Who supposes it to be a real conversation between the Judge and those on His right hand or those on His left, in the parable immediately following? Who ever imagined that the words put into the mouth of the rich man in torment or of Abraham, were actually spoken? In the parable before us, as in those to which we have just alluded, the thoughts and desires of the heart are clothed in words, and the scene is not a description of anything that really takes place, but a story illustrating the principles on which God and man are respectively acting.

The last section of the twenty-fifth chapter relates the judgment which Christ will execute on the nations of the earth, when He comes in His kingdom glory, to "break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces, like a potter's vessel." It represents Jesus coming as the minister of judgment. But this judgment is divided into various acts. In the Revelation,



we have nothing described but the judgment executed on the beast and false prophet and the armies that followed them. Other acts of judgment are, however, related elsewhere. We read in the prophecies of Joel that the Lord will "bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem," and that He will then "gather all nations, and will bring them down unto the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for My people and for My heritage, Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations" (Joel iii. 1, 2). Without discussing how far this is to be literally or figuratively understood, let us compare it with the scene described in Matthew. "When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory; and before Him shall be gathered all THE nations" (Matt. xxv. 31, 32). The article here is important, because it helps materially to determine the real character of the scene enacted. The translators, believing the event to be a general and final judgment, dropped it in order to give a more universal character to the gathering. It is, however, in the original, and the question is who are meant by "all the nations?"

The word "nations" means "Gentiles," and is ordinarily used to describe them as distinguished from the Jews. Now in this scene there are not two classes as generally supposed, but three,—the sheep, the goats, and "these my brethren." These persons called Christ's brethren are neither sheep nor goats, nor are they themselves brought into the judgment. It is



for their conduct to these "brethren," who have been hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, and in prison—a persecuted, despised, forsaken people, that the Gentiles are judged. How exactly this agrees, then, with the prediction of Joel, and indeed, with the general current of Old Testament prophecy! All Scripture concurs in representing the Jews as forsaken of God for an indefinite period. When this period has elapsed, the Lord "will bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem," and will judge the nations for the cruel oppression with which they have, especially towards the close of this epoch, treated His people. It is true that in this scene described in Matthew, the saints are not mentioned as accompanying Jesus, but, as I have already shown, our Lord purposely left this subject obscure throughout His whole teaching. On the other hand, the angels are named, thus bringing the account into close accordance with the description of Christ's return in judgment given in 2 Thess. i. 7, 8. This judgment of the nations, then, foretold in Old Testament Scriptures, is the very judgment, represented figuratively, no doubt, but with striking vividness, in the passage before us. "These my brethren" are the saved remnant of Israel, who, having received at the Lord's hands double for all their sins, are now delivered from their enemies, and owned by Christ as His people. "All the nations" are the Gentiles, who are now dealt with according to the favour or hostility they have shown to God's chosen race.

The passage shows the simplicity of Scripture when its light is directly received, instead of being refracted through the distorting medium of man's theological systems. As a judgment of the nations on Christ's return for Israel's restoration, the narrative is free from difficulty, but describes a striking fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. As a picture of the traditional resurrection and judgment, it is full of contradictions and absurdities, being an account of a universal judgment in which some are not judged, and of a universal resurrection in which nobody is raised !

IV. But there is another passage which will occur to the minds of some readers. "We must all appear" (or be manifested), says Paul, "before the judgment seat of Christ ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. v. 10). And again, "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. xiv. 10). These are deeply solemn words, which our hearts would do well to ponder. The same Saviour who makes Himself known as the loving friend gone to prepare a place for us, and waiting to come again and receive us unto Himself, also reveals Himself as the Judge walking among the candlesticks, with "His eyes as a flame of fire, and His feet like unto fine brass." "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. xiv. 12)—the lost, when He comes to judge the dead out of the things written in the books—and the saved also,

when He reckons with His servants, and dispenses rewards.

But there is not a word about the two classes standing together, or for the same purpose. In the parable of the talents, recorded in Luke, besides the difference between the diligent and slothful servants, there is also a difference between the diligent servants proportioned to their merit. This shows that the saved are variously rewarded according to the measure of their faithfulness. The same principle, of the manifestation of the saved according to their works, is taught by Paul. "Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward; if any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. iii. 12-15). This is the manifestation of believers according to their works, a solemn thing most assuredly, and a deep reality, as true as the judgment of the lost, but at the same time altogether distinct from it, both as to the time and the circumstances of its occurrence.

The word translated "judgment seat" means only a step or raised platform, such as a person exercising any authority, or pronouncing a speech, might occupy. It will include "the great white throne," before which

the dead are summoned for their final sentence, but it is a word of much wider import, and by no means necessarily, or indeed primarily, signifies the seat occupied by a judge on a criminal trial. It is used of the daïs on which Herod sat, when he received the embassy from Tyre and Sidon (Acts xii. 21), and is there rendered by our translators, "throne." The word would be just as applicable to the seat occupied by a judge in a civil suit, or by an assessor awarding compensation, as to the seat of a judge trying a case of life and death. And these are really the two different actions described. The lost will appear before the tribunal to be tried on the question of life and death, "out of those things which were written in the books" (Rev. xx. 12). How is this possible with the believer? Can the penitent thief be taken out of paradise to be put on his trial as to whether he shall be saved or lost? Can Paul, after being with Jesus more than eighteen centuries, be summoned before His bar to be tried for his life? Impossible! No, the appearance before the judgment seat in the case of believers is of a different kind, for a different purpose, and at a different season. It is before the reign of Christ, instead of at the end of the world; and it is for the purpose of determining, not whether they shall be saved or lost—a question which can never be raised again for those whom God has justified, but to what reward they are entitled by the measure of their faithfulness here below, whether they have built the "gold, silver, and precious stones,"

which can endure the searching fire of the Divine scrutiny, or the "wood, hay, and stubble," which shall perish before the judicial test, and leave them to be saved "so as by fire,"—or again, whether in the apportionment of dominion among the "fellow-heirs," they should be made ruler over ten cities or over five.

And here we would note, in confirmation of what has been already said, the perfect and Divine accuracy of the language used by the Spirit of God. It is said that all shall "appear" before the judgment seat [or throne] of Christ, the real meaning being that all shall be manifested. In this all are included, saved and lost. The word used, therefore, is merely that they shall "stand" or "be manifested"—not that they shall be "judged." On the other hand, where it speaks only of the unbelieving dead, raised before the great white throne, the expression employed is that they shall be "judged." This is no fanciful or refined distinction. Our Lord Himself, while here on earth, says—"He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment" (John v. 24). Almost immediately afterwards He speaks of two resurrections, a "resurrection of life" and a "resurrection of judgment" (ver. 29). Surely two passages standing in such close juxtaposition show that judgment, so far as the question of salvation is concerned, is a thing from which the believer has already escaped. Being justified, it is impossible that he shall be judged. Hence the very fact that all those raised in the last



scene, after the end of the world, are judged, is conclusive evidence, that the believers in Jesus Christ are not there. When their deeds are inquired into, it is not for the purpose of judging them, but that they may be manifested, and rewarded according to the measure of their faithfulness on earth.

V. It is possible that some persons may be disposed to found an argument in favour of a general resurrection at the end of the world upon the expression, "I will raise him up at the last day" (1 John vi. 40, 44, 54), and from the phrase, "at the last trump" (1 Cor. xv. 52). But "the last" need not mean the very last thing in the world's history, merely the last event in the process under consideration. In John vi. Jesus is speaking of His care of those given Him by the Father, and says that He will lose nothing, but will raise it up at the last day. The work of guarding the charge committed to Him will then be at an end, the task entrusted to Him by the Father will be fully performed, the last day of this class of responsibility will have arrived, and the believer whom He has tended will be perfected. So "the last trump" is the last event of the kind in the scene described. This chapter, as already pointed out, has nothing to do with the resurrection of the lost. It simply relates what will become of the saved. For a time some of them are in the grave, but this ends, and "the last trump" calls them forth to life and glory. The expressions used, as



above understood, are familiar in daily talk. A barrister speaks of the last day, meaning the last day of term or assizes—a soldier of the last bugle, meaning the last call in the exercise he is going through. Nobody imagines they mean the last day that will ever dawn or the last bugle that will ever sound.

We have now examined the passages commonly cited to prove a general resurrection and judgment at the end of the world, and have found that none of them sustain this theological dogma. Most of them have nothing to do with a resurrection at all. None of them describe events happening to believers at the end of the world. On the other hand, Scripture speaks of two resurrections. One of these is when Christ comes for His saints, and is an event for which believers, whether in the first or third watch, are bidden diligently to wait. The other is at the end of the world. In “the first resurrection” all “those who are Christ’s,” whether living or dead, will be changed into His likeness, and caught up to be “for ever with the Lord.” They will come forth with Him when He appears to break the nations with a rod of iron, and as His fellow-heirs will “reign with Him a thousand years.”

But now a very important question arises—a question already often alluded to—How is it that a hope, for which believers have from the first been instructed to wait, should have been so long delayed? Is not a promise which has been withheld for so many genera-

tions either altogether delusive, or at least so unlikely to receive its fulfilment in our time, that it would be idle still to cherish it as a present hope ?

We have already said much on this subject which need not now be repeated. But in addition to what has been previously urged, we would reply,—First, that since the Word of God has set the Lord's return before us as a present hope, it is not for us to question His truth because we cannot understand the principle of His acting ; secondly, that the hope is given to the heart, not to the head, and where the heart is really true to Jesus and longs for His return, it will not cease from its waiting attitude because of the delay which comes between it and the object of its desire ; thirdly, that Jesus expressly warns His disciples, a warning which extends to all ages, against saying in their hearts, “ My lord delayeth his coming,” and while intimating that several watches might pass before the hour arrived, still declares that “ blessed are those servants, whom the lord, when he cometh, shall find ” so waiting ; fourthly, that the Holy Ghost solemnly predicts and warns us against the spirit which asks, “ Where is the promise of His coming, for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation ? ” and reminds us that the word which man disregarded when it foretold the deluge, has spoken of the more fearful judgments yet to come (2 Pet. iii. 4-7) ; and fifthly, that “ one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day,”

so that, notwithstanding the apparently long tarrying, "the Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (ver. 8, 9). Is it not a deeply solemn thought that men are found, now as ever, to condemn the riches of God's goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, and to make the very grace in which He is acting, the ground for mocking at His promises and despising His commandments? Yet how many even of the Lord's own children can look into their hearts, and say—I am guiltless in this matter?



*PART SECOND.*

THE HOPE OF ISRAEL AND CREATION.





## CHAPTER I.

### GOD'S PROMISES CONCERNING THE EARTH.

IN our first part, we have seen two classes of hope held out in Scripture—the hope of the believer, the redemption of the body; and the hope of creation, deliverance “from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.” This latter is the great subject of the Old Testament prophets. It is effected by the return of Jesus with His saints to execute judgment on the wicked and set up His throne in righteousness.

But why these different modes of acting? Why this long concealment of the heavenly hope, and then, after its fulfilment, a return to the earthly hope, so long announced and so long deferred? The question is one of deepest interest, and like all other subjects, which bring out the counsels and purposes of God, cannot fail, if rightly apprehended, to display in brighter lustre the riches of His glory and the depths of His wisdom.

All Scripture is the history of two men, who are thus described—“The first man is of the earth, earthy;

the Second Man is the Lord from heaven" (1 Cor. xv. 47). The New Testament unfolds the heavenly character and the heavenly work of the "Second Man." The Old Testament treats of the relations of these two men with the earth. It records the history of the first man, created in innocence, falling under the power of sin, and ever manifesting in darker colours his ruin and his alienation from God. It foretells the triumphs of the Second Man, who retrieved the ruin brought in by the first, and glorified God in the scene in which sin had dishonoured Him. It was the entrance of sin and the ruin of the first creation, that gave God the opportunity (if we may so speak) of bringing forth this Second Man, in whom all the glories of His person are displayed and all the treasures of His love unfolded. We shall see the character and extent of the ruin, and the failure of the first man in every position in which God placed him ; and we shall see how the Second Man takes up the broken thread, and carries to perfection the Divine purposes.

This will appear very plainly if we look at the various promises of blessing made to man on the earth. I shall show that none of the promises have yet received their complete (some of them not even a partial) fulfilment, and that all await their perfect accomplishment in the "revelation" of the Second Man, the Lord from heaven, according to the New Testament prophecies at which we have already glanced. The promises might be classified in various

ways, but for our present purpose it will be sufficient to enumerate the following leading features :—

FIRST—That the woman's seed should bruise the serpent's head ;

SECOND—That in Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed ;

THIRD—That Abraham's seed should possess the land of Canaan and should be head of the nations ;

FOURTH—That David's seed should reign over the earth, and that of his kingdom there should be no end.

I. Man was created innocent. His state in innocence was one of dependence upon God, subjection to Him, and communion with Him ; of entire freedom from disease and death ; and of headship over a creation which God had blessed and pronounced very good. But Satan, working on man's self-will and unbelief, brought in sin, and all was ruined. Man lost the sense of dependence upon God, and gained an evil heart of unbelief. He exchanged subjection to God for subjection to Satan ; communion with God for alienation and a desire to hide from His presence. He became the prey of disease and death. The physical world, the very ground, was cursed for his sake, so that from that hour "the

whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." But while the first man is thus ruined, God speaks of One named the "woman's seed," to whom the earliest promise is given. Adam had been overcome by Satan; but the woman's seed was to vanquish the victor, and though Himself wounded in the conflict, was to crush the head of the destroyer.

Two things are here noticeable. First, in the curse pronounced on Adam, not a word is said about anything beyond death. God's blessing on man had only set him in the earth as its head and ruler; and the curse goes no further than to revoke the earthly blessing. This is important as defining the sphere of Old Testament truth. From the New Testament we know that after death comes the judgment, also that the patriarchs desired "a better country, that is, an heavenly," but on these matters the Old Testament is silent. Hence it is clear that the scope of the Old Testament is only God's purposes about the earth. Its silence as to anything after death does not imply that nothing was known; merely that this class of truth is outside its proper sphere, and should not be looked for in this portion of God's Word. The second thing to be observed is, that there is no promise of the removal or mitigation of the curse, no hint of moral or spiritual improvement, given to the first Adam. A promise is given, but it centres in another, the woman's seed. The first man is driven from the garden, excluded from the tree of life, left helpless in the grasp of his conqueror. Disease and death, a

groaning creation and moral alienation from God still subsist, the badges of his servitude and the witnesses of his fall. But complete triumph is promised to the Second Man. By Him alone can the enemy of God and the destroyer of man be stripped of his dominion and trampled in the dust.

From these two fountain-heads—the fallen Adam and the woman's seed, flow two streams, the one dark as death, the other rich with the promise of blessing, and ever broadening and deepening into fuller glory. The history of ruined man, the first stream, rolls on in gathering gloom, till it issues in the rejection of the Christ and the reception of the Anti-Christ. The unfolding of God's purposes in His Son, the second stream, also moves on without interruption, each accession of human guilt only adding to its volume, and bringing out the glory of God and His chosen one with more striking beauty. Man left to himself goes on from bad to worse. Science and art flourish, cities are built, wealth accumulates; but the earth was corrupt and filled with violence, and God said, "I will destroy man whom I have created." The flood came, "the world that then was" perished, and Noah issued forth into an earth cleansed from pollution. This earth God blesses, because of the sweet savour, the type of Christ, which He smelled; but man's character remains unchanged. "And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in His heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is

evil from his youth ; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease " (Gen. viii. 21, 22).

But besides the removal of the curse from the soil, God entrusts the sword of government to man, ordaining that "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed " (Gen. ix. 6). Thus man is placed on a renewed earth, and with civil institutions directly sanctioned by God. All, however, is of no avail. Noah, so far from showing himself able to govern the earth, cannot even govern himself. Man uses government for the purpose of godless self-exaltation, and it is confounded at Babel. Before Abraham's time the worship of God Himself had been given up for the worship of devils. "Your fathers," says Joshua, "dwelt on the other side of the flood (the river Euphrates) in old time : even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods " (Josh. xxiv. 2). That these other gods were devils we learn elsewhere. "They sacrifice unto devils, not to God," says Moses in his song (Deut. xxxii. 17). And again, "They sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils" (Ps. cvi. 37). So, too, the Apostle Paul writes. "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils " (1 Cor. x. 20).

II. But the increasing wickedness of man only



serves to show forth more conspicuously the boundless resources of God. He calls Abraham from the midst of this idolatry, leads him forth into a distant land, and there makes to him and to his seed two closely connected but distinct promises. One of these, often repeated, and variously expressed, is thus first announced—"In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. xii. 3). This is repeated in almost the same words in Gen. xviii. 18, but somewhat later, after the obedience shown in giving up Isaac, it takes a different form—"And *in thy seed* shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. xxii. 18). In this last shape it is renewed to Isaac (Gen. xxvi. 4). Again Jacob is told—"In thee and *in thy seed* shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. xxviii. 14). Now here, though the blessing is said to be in Abraham, it is clear that the seed, and not Abraham, was the object of God's thoughts. Abraham was the root of blessing only as he was the father of this promised seed. This is obvious from the reference made to this promise in the New Testament. "Now to Abraham, and his seed," writes Paul, "were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. iii. 16). And this is spoken with reference to the whole of the promises, even those in which no mention of the seed was made (ver. 8). So that the seed spoken of in these passages is not the nation of Israel, but Christ. Here again, therefore, the promise is not in the first man, but in the Second,

that same seed of the woman who, according to the earliest promise, was to crush the head of the serpent.

III. There is, however, another promise given to Abraham. "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing, and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee" (Gen. xii. 2, 3). This promise was accompanied by another, "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (ver. 7). Still later, Jehovah said to him, "Lift up now thine eyes and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed *for ever*" (Gen. xiii. 14, 15). The boundaries of the gift are afterward stated—"Unto thy seed have I given this land, *from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates*" (Gen. xv. 18); and the perpetuity of the possession is further guaranteed—"I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, *for an everlasting possession*" (Gen. xvii. 8). Moreover their supremacy over other nations is promised—"In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and *thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies*" (Gen. xxii. 17). The promise is renewed, without material variation, to Isaac (Gen. xxvi. 3, 4). But in

the prophetic blessing bestowed on Jacob by his father, we have the addition, "Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee; be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee; cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee" (Gen. xxvii. 29). The same promise is further given to Jacob at Bethel (xxviii. 13, 14), and once more after his return to the land (xxxv. 11, 12). In the vision of Balaam, we have this strain again renewed. "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign-aloes which Jehovah hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn: he shall eat up the nations, his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows. He couched, he lay down as a lion and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee" (Num. xxiv. 5-9).

Now it is clear from the language spoken to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that the seed referred to in these promises is not Christ, but a multitude, like the sand of the sea-shore; and the words put by the Spirit of God into the mouth of Baalam show that this multitude was the nation of Israel. This may seem at first

sight to be at variance with what I have before said—that all the promises refer to Christ, and that all blessings come to the earth through Him. I shall show, however, that the contradiction is only apparent, that these promises have not yet had their fulfilment, but failed through the sin and corruption of the first man, and will only receive their accomplishment when the Second Man is brought forth, and by means of the work He performs.

A short examination of the promises compared with the history of Israel will make it clear that in this history they receive only a very partial and imperfect fulfilment. In the first place, the promises were given to the patriarchs absolutely without condition. But the Israelites have never had an unconditional possession of the land of Canaan. The terms on which they entered were these—"If ye will walk in My statutes, and keep My commandments and do them, then I will give you rain," and other promised blessings. "For I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful and multiply you, and establish My covenant with you" (Lev. xxvi. 3-9). "But if ye will not hearken unto Me, and will not do all these commandments" . . . . "I will bring the land into desolation, and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it; and I will scatter you among the Gentiles, and will draw out a sword after you; and your land shall be desolate and your cities waste" (ver. 14-33). The same thing is repeated in still stronger language in Deut. xxviii. The Israelites

never had, therefore, anything more than a conditional tenure of the land, and it is needless to say that a conditional gift is no fulfilment of an unconditional promise. This is not left to our own judgment, however, for we are plainly told in the language of Paul, "That the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise, but God gave it to Abraham by promise" (Gal. iii. 17, 18).

Again, except for a short time in the latter part of David's reign and the beginning of Solomon's, Israel did not possess the gates of her enemies, nor were other nations blessed or cursed according as they blessed or cursed her. On the contrary, her history is one of failure, of servitude, of defeat, ending in complete overthrow and captivity.

Moreover, the boundaries of the land taken possession of by Israel, instead of extending "from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates," comprised a mere fraction of this territory. And even within the limited portion which they professedly occupied, no mean part was really in the hands of their enemies.

Lastly, the land was given to the seed of Abraham "for ever," or as it is elsewhere expressed, "for an everlasting possession." That this was not the case with Israel's possession of Canaan is certain. But has



the Lord forgotten His promise ? Or are we to assume that the promise was not meant for Israel ? So far from it, we find that in the same prophecy in which the Lord speaks of the conditional tenure, and foretells the casting out of Israel in case of disobedience, He points forward to the time when the promise made to Abraham will receive its true fulfilment. "When they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them to destroy them utterly, and to break My covenant with them" (Lev. xxvi. 44). He says also—"Then will I remember My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember ; and I will remember the land" (ver. 42). The conditional and temporary possession enjoyed by Israel is not, therefore, the fulfilment of the covenant with the fathers.

We see, then, that Israel never received the promise. A partial fulfilment doubtless took place, and this we shall find to be God's general mode of acting. When a promise is given, the first man is tried to see whether he can inherit it. This is the partial fulfilment, and the result invariably is to prove the inability of man after the flesh to receive any blessing from God's hands. This, however, does not cause God to change His purpose, or the promise to remain unfulfilled. He has in reserve, as the focus in which all the promises centre, the Second Man, the man of His own right hand, whom He will bring forth in His own time to receive all that the first man has failed to obtain,



and to do all that the first man has failed to accomplish. The Scripture evidence that Israel's national blessing and glory are fulfilled in the reign of Christ, as well as the character of that reign, will occupy us hereafter; though when we look, immediately, at the fourth promise, we shall find enough to satisfy us on this point in the present stage of our inquiry.

IV. The third promise awaits, as we have seen, its complete fulfilment. It had, however, a partial and tentative fulfilment in the entrance of the Israelites into Canaan—and their subsequent chequered history in the land. At length God called to their head a man after His own heart, and to him He gave the last of the four leading promises above enumerated. The passage containing this promise is remarkable. "I took thee," says the Lord, "from the sheep-cote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel: and I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth. Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as before-time. And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and [I] have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also Jehovah telleth

thee that He will make thee an house ; and when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for My name, and I will stablsh the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be My son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men. But My mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee : thy throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam. vii. 8-16).

Now this promise evidently has a double application. It refers in part to David's immediate successors, who did commit iniquity and were chastened with the rod of men. But it is manifest that the terms of the prophecy correspond only in very small measure with the history of the Jewish sovereigns, and that nothing has yet taken place at all resembling the permanent dominion here described. There can be no doubt, then, that the prophecy has yet to receive its fulfilment, and that this fulfilment is to be found in "the Second Man." Indeed, the language of Hebrews makes this plain, for there a portion of this prophecy, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to Me a son," is expressly quoted as referring to Christ. But the prophecy brings out another thing, connected with the promise to Abraham we were last considering.

Though this prophecy was uttered at the moment of Israel's greatest glory, God speaks of their establishment in peace and security as still future—"I WILL appoint a place for My people Israel, and WILL plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more;" and He further connects this stable possession with the reign of the Son of David of whom He said—"I will stablish the throne of His kingdom for ever." This dominion of the seed of David is also associated in a prophecy closely resembling the above, with the blessing of the whole earth, promised through the seed of Abraham. Among the glories of the kingdom established by David's Son, we read, "His name shall endure for ever; His name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed" (Ps. lxxii. 17).

Thus we find the two promises to Abraham and the promise to David linked together, all awaiting their fulfilment in that Second Man who will take up God's purposes of blessing concerning the earth, and carry them into execution for His glory. Committed to the first man, they have utterly failed. Entrusted to the Second Man, they will be triumphantly accomplished. He it is who will crush the head of the deceiver of the world; He it is in whom all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; He it is that shall deliver Israel out of the hand of her enemies to serve Him without fear; He it is who shall have dominion

from sea to sea, and of whose kingdom there shall be no end. He alone, as the myriads of angels declare, is “worthy to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”

## CHAPTER II.

### THE PROMISES NOT FULFILLED BY CHRIST'S FIRST COMING.

THE question now arises, When and how do these promises receive their fulfilment? It is agreed that so far as they are yet unaccomplished, they will receive it in the person and work of Christ. But here the agreement ends. Most interpreters hold that the promise as to the land has already been fulfilled, and that the other promises either have been, or will be, fulfilled as the immediate or ultimate result of the first coming of Christ. I have already shown that the former of these views is a mistake. I shall now inquire whether there is any better foundation for the latter.

The interpretation which makes all the promises flow out of Christ's first coming, rests on two assumptions—

I. That the Church is the same seed of Abraham to which the promises are given; and

II. That the universal reign of David's seed, the blessing of the nations and the bruising of the serpent's head, will all be fulfilled by the conversion of the world to Christianity.

Before examining these propositions, I will ask one question. Could any thoughtful and spiritual Jew, before the time of Christ, reading his own prophets and trusting God, have believed that God's promises did not refer to national blessing and restoration, but to blessing of a different kind and given to a different people, blessing which must begin with the dispersion, and end with the absorption, of his own nation? If not, the prophecies, as above interpreted, could only deceive him. But let us examine these rules separately.

I. The first rule of interpretation is, that the Church is the seed of Abraham to which the promises are given. Now that believers are the children of Abraham is not disputed. The question is, whether they absorb into themselves, and divert from Israel, the promises given under this head. In one of the Abrahamic promises, the seed named is Christ Himself; in the other it is a countless multitude. To this innumerable seed was promised the perpetual possession of a certain geographical area, together with national supremacy in the earth. Now how can this be interpreted as the portion of the Church? But since it has not yet been given to Israel, and since it is not the portion of the Church, the promise still has to receive its fulfilment outside the Church. In other words, the Church does not set aside Israel, or usurp the promise of national blessing and glory.

This is enough for our purpose, for if the Church



does not embrace *all* the unfulfilled promises, the common interpretation fails. It may be well, however, for the sake of clearing up what to some is a real difficulty, to look at the passages on which this interpretation rests. Romans iv. 11-17 says that Abraham "received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised; that he might be the father of all them that believe though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also; and the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise that he should be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. (For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect; because the law worketh wrath, for where no law is, there is no transgression.) Therefore it is of faith that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; *not to that only which is of the law*, but to that *also* which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations."

But the promise here is not the promise of the land. It is a summary of God's promises announcing His purpose to make Abraham the root of blessing. Thus believers are morally Abraham's children, as the

father of the faithful. This is all that the passage states as to relationship. They will inherit the world as joint-heirs with Christ, and the promises to Abraham are varied and extended in God's grace to include them. This is all that the passage says about the promises. The specific promise to the descendants of Abraham is not transferred to the Church, and is altogether inapplicable to it. And so far are the literal seed from being set aside by the spiritual seed, that the promise is expressly stated to belong to the seed "*which is of the law*," as well as to that "*which is of the faith of Abraham*."

In Galatians iii. 7, we are told "that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." In ver. 27-29, we read, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female : for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." Here the promise is the blessing of all nations in the seed, that is in Christ. Of this promise believers are heirs as made one with Christ. The chapter does not name the promise given to the multitudinous seed, much less show the Church as taking this promise away from Israel.

But again, it is written—"He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh ; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart"

(Rom. ii. 28, 29). Also, "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit" (Phil. iii. 3). So too,—*"As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God"* (Gal. vi. 16). Do not these passages, it may be asked, show that Christians have now become the true Israel and the true circumcision? The first passage, however, is not written about Christians at all, but about Gentiles who fulfilled the law as compared with Jews who broke it. The second simply warns believers against going back to symbols, on the ground that they have that which these symbols only typified. In the third, the expression, "Israel of God," is figuratively applied to those, who for the time had taken Israel's place as the special object of God's favour.

The collective testimony of these passages, then, is that believers are spiritually the children of Abraham; that in Christ they are heirs of the promises; that they have the thing which circumcision outwardly signified; and that they possess the place of priority in God's present dealings which Israel once enjoyed. But that the specific promises made to Israel are handed over to the Church is a notion which none of the passages even suggests, and which one of them expressly refutes, by reserving the promise to the seed, *"which is of the law."* In like manner the Apostle Paul, while fully disclosing the counsels of God in setting aside Israel for a while, declares that still to the Israelites *"pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the*

service of God, *and the promises*" (Rom. ix. 4). Of the positive side of this question, however, I shall speak more fully hereafter. I merely quote this verse in passing as a direct refutation of the inference that is often drawn from a hasty interpretation of the portions above cited.

II. The second rule of interpretation is, that the universal reign of David's seed, the universal blessing of the nations, and the bruising of the serpent's head, are all brought about by the conversion of the world to Christianity.

Now assuredly nobody denies the untold wealth of blessing flowing out to the nations of the earth from Christianity. So magnificent is the believer's portion that, were we left to our own thoughts, we might well suppose these blessings to fulfil all God's purposes of grace. But Scripture teaches otherwise. Speaking of Israel and their present rejection, it says,—"Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness" (Rom. xi. 12). The world's complete measure of blessing, then, is only brought in by the "fulness" of Israel. But it may be asked, Does not this mean the conversion of the Jews to Christianity? The Word of God does not say so, and all the reasoning of the chapter points to the contrary conclusion. For, first, it is said that "as concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sakes; but as touching the election they are beloved

for the fathers' sakes" (ver. 28). Now, if they come into the same blessing and in the same way as the Gentiles, where is the contrast? Secondly, the Gentile is warned that he *may* be cut off, and this warning becomes a dark certainty, when we find that his tenure of privilege depends on a faithfulness in which he has entirely failed (ver. 22). But thirdly, Israel's exclusion, "Until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (ver. 25), shows that the period of Gentile blessing *will* end, and that Jewish blessing cannot go on at the same time as Gentile; in other words, that the blessings are of a character incompatible with each other. Fourthly, the whole reasoning of the chapter points to the cessation of Gentile, and the renewal of Jewish privilege, as a great dispensational change marked by the "Deliverer" coming out of Zion, and turning "away ungodliness from Jacob" (ver. 26), a description wholly without meaning as applied to the conversion of Israel to Christianity. Thus the reign of David's seed and the blessing of the Gentiles, instead of being brought about, as this rule of interpretation requires, by the Christianising of the world, only begins in its largest sense after Christianity has ceased, and Israel as a nation has been restored.

But again, if this system of interpretation is correct, if all the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament receive their fulfilment in Christianity, how is it that the New Testament is so silent about them? Why do the writers, inspired by the Holy Ghost to

unfold the truth of Christianity, make hardly any allusion to them? The prophecies of Isaiah abound with glorious predictions of the exaltation of the Lord's mountain above the hills, of the beating of swords into ploughshares, of the knowledge of Jehovah covering the earth as the waters do the sea. Preachers constantly quote these prophecies as having their fulfilment in the triumphs of the gospel. Did Jesus in His teaching ever do so? Did Paul ever do so? Why not? Was Paul less keenly alive to the prophetic glories than these preachers? Why, then, is his language so different from theirs? His silence on this inviting theme would be inexplicable, unless he had been taught by the Spirit that the Old Testament prophecies were not to be fulfilled in Christianity, but in quite a different way.

But it is not merely the silence of Scripture, however suggestive, that clashes with this rule of interpretation. The New Testament furnishes the strongest evidence that Christianity, instead of overspreading the earth, and bringing in the final period of blessing foretold in ancient prophecy, will have a sadly different history. We have already looked at a passage in which the Gentile is told that God's goodness is extended to him, "If thou continue in His goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Rom. xi. 22). Thus the Gentiles are placed as a whole in the same position of responsibility and trial as the Jews were of old. Will anybody say that the Gentiles have been more faithful to the trust put in their hands than the



Jews were? Will anybody say that they have, as a body, continued in God's goodness? If not, they must be cut off. And if God had intended to plant them securely as He has promised to plant Israel, would He ever have spoken of their being cut off? This passage, then, instead of predicting the universal spread of Christianity, declares by implication that it will cease, and that God's purposes of blessing for the earth will be accomplished by other means.

We have, however, other indications of the future of Christianity as a professing system in the world. Paul warns the Ephesian elders—"After my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts xx. 29, 30). Here we have the seeds; let us look at the plant. "Now the Spirit speaks expressly that in the *latter time* some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1 Tim. iv. 1). Such are the "latter days" of Christendom as foretold by the apostle. Now hear the "latter days" spoken of by the Hebrew prophet. "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek Jehovah their God, and David their king; and shall fear Jehovah and His goodness in the *latter days*" (Hosea iii. 5). Are the apostle and the prophet writing of the same thing? Impossible! But if not, the Old Testament prophecies have not their fulfilment in the Church and Christianity.

These, however, are only the "latter days." Does the Spirit, then, give us any brighter picture of the "last days?" Listen to the words of Paul. "This know also, that in the *last days* perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false-accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (2 Tim. iii. 1-5). So, too, Peter speaks of false teachers, "who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them," and through covetousness should, "with feigned words make merchandise of you" (2 Peter ii. 1-3). Is this followed by improvement? On the contrary,—"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the *last days* scoffers walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Peter iii. 3, 4). Jude warns believers, "Remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, how that they told you there should be mockers in the *last time*, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit" (Jude 17-19). John also writes—"Little children, it is the *last time*; and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the *last time*" (1 John ii. 18).

This shows that one mark of the "last time" is the appearance of antichrists, which in principle—so early did corruption set in—had already begun.

Contrast all this with the "last days" spoken of by the prophet. "And it shall come to pass in the *last days* that the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it; and many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob: and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem; and He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. ii. 2-4). Is it possible to conceive a greater contrast? And yet, according to the interpretation we are examining, Isaiah is speaking of the same thing, and describing the same epoch in its history, as Paul and John.

But did not Jesus Himself, in the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven, predict the conversion of the world? Everybody knows that the parables are constantly so interpreted. But is such an interpretation correct? They form part of a group of three in which Jesus unfolds to His disciples, to whom it was given "to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven," the mysterious form in which it was about

to be established. The first parable discloses that in this form of the kingdom, the wheat and the tares would grow side by side till "the end of the age." It is not, therefore, of true believers, but of Christendom, that Jesus speaks, and in Christendom, instead of the universal triumph of the gospel, the wheat and the tares grow side by side until the end.

Now it is impossible that the two parables immediately following this can contradict it. What, then, is their true meaning? The first likens the kingdom of heaven—this mixture of wheat and tares—to a grain of mustard seed, "which, indeed, is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof" (Matt. xiii. 32). What is there here about the conversion of the world? All that the parable shows is that the kingdom of heaven, or Christendom, grows from a very small thing to a tree, the symbol for a great earthly power, in which the birds of the air—clean and unclean things—have their habitation.

The other parable compares the kingdom to "leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened" (Matt. xiii. 33). According to the received interpretation, the meal is the world, the leaven the gospel, and the leavening of the mass the universal spread of Christianity. But what is the authority for this interpretation? According to all Scripture symbols, the meal signifies what is

good, whereas this interpretation makes it signify what is bad ; according to all Scripture symbols, the leaven signifies what is bad, whereas this interpretation makes it signify what is good ; according to all Scripture symbols, the leavening of the meal signifies the corruption of what is pure, whereas this interpretation makes it signify the purifying of what is corrupt. The connection declares that the kingdom of heaven will be spoiled by Satan's work, and that the damage will endure to the end ; the traditional interpretation would make Satan's work to be eradicated, and the damage not to endure to the end. Finally, the parable, as ordinarily understood, derives no confirmation from fact ; whereas the parable, understood according to the usage of Scripture and the immediate context, is in painful accordance with the history of Christianity in all ages.

There is only one other point on which it is necessary to touch. We have shown that the hope of the believer, held out in Scripture, is the coming of Christ to take the Church to Himself. The inconsistency of such a present hope, with the supposed conversion of the world to Christianity, I need not again insist upon. I only now allude to it as showing how perfectly harmonious the Word of God is with itself, and how invariably opposed to the theological dogmas and traditional interpretations which a corrupt Christendom has placed upon it. Being ignorant of the mystery of God's working, Christendom has become wise in its own conceits ; instead of fearing, it has been high-



minded ; it has boasted itself against the branches, and laughed to scorn the solemn warning, "If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee." And what is the result ? Instead of enjoying its own heavenly blessings, it has appropriated the Jewish earthly blessings. It has run the streams of prophecy into Church channels, through which they were never meant to flow, and, on the strength of predictions which do not belong to it, has forgotten that if it does not continue in God's goodness, it also shall be cut off. Judaism, confident in the promises, blind to the signs of the times, and moving on presumptuously to unforeseen destruction, was a spectacle that moved the soul of Jesus to tears. What are His thoughts as He gazes down upon Christendom, equally confident and equally blind, boasting itself in its fancied security, and ignorant of the terrible judgment towards which it is recklessly hastening ?

And now let us look back for a moment at what we have found to be the testimony of Scripture concerning the question whether the Old Testament promises are fulfilled in Christianity. We have seen that though believers, through God's grace, are brought into the circle of Abraham's seed, and so made partakers of the promises, there is another class, the natural seed, to whom the promises are still said to belong ; that it is not till this class, Israelites according to the flesh, receive their portion, that the full blessing to the Gentiles will be secured ; that there is



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no foundation for the belief that the world will be converted through the preaching of the gospel, but the strongest evidence to the contrary ; and that the hope of the Lord's coming is inconsistent with this traditional expectation. We must still seek, therefore, what information Scripture gives as to the mode in which those mighty promises of earthly blessing are to receive their fulfilment.

## CHAPTER III.

### GOD'S DEALINGS WITH ISRAEL AND THE WORLD.

THE Old Testament promises are, as we have seen, earthly in their character. Their accomplishment is in the Second Man, but not in Christianity, which has a heavenly and not an earthly portion. The earth, however, was man's original sphere, the scene for which he was created, and God has not abandoned it to the dominion of sin and Satan, but will carry out to the full all the purposes He has formed concerning it. Let us endeavour, then, to see, from the Scriptures, what is God's scheme with respect to this earth and the man whom He has set upon it.

In the world before the flood man was left simply to his own guidance. The murderer was punished by God, but no punishment by his fellow-man, as God's instrument of righteous government, was permitted. After the flood the sword of government was entrusted to man, and Noah was commanded to execute the judgment of death on the murderer. In this way civil government, as a direct trust from God, had its origin. At Babel the compact organisation of mankind, leading to presumption and self-will, was broken up,

and thus nations were formed to be the instruments, in God's hands, of checking the arrogance and self-assertion which would otherwise have burst through all restraints (Gen. xi. 6). But God had in His thoughts a special nation, concerning which His purpose was long afterwards thus revealed. "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, for Jehovah's portion is His people, Jacob is the lot of His inheritance" (Deut. xxxii. 8, 9). Thus long before Abraham was born, God had this people in His thoughts. In process of time a country was assigned to them, from the river Euphrates to the river of Egypt, which they were to hold "for an everlasting possession;" there planted, they were to "possess the gates of their enemies," those who blessed them were to be blessed and those who cursed them to be cursed. God's scheme of earthly government, then, as far as it was yet unfolded, was to exalt one nation as the administrator of His righteous judgments.

This plan, which will be perfectly carried out under the Second Man, was originally entrusted to the first, not fully indeed, but sufficiently to prove his inability to accomplish God's purposes. Israel entered on the land, charged to execute God's righteous judgment on the Canaanites, to keep His law, and to hold the first place among the nations. The people were in these matters God's instrument for the righteous government

of the earth. If they were to destroy the Canaanites, it was as the ministers of God's just judgments. If in their law they were to exact "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Ex. xxi. 23-25), it was as the executors of God's governmental righteousness. If their enemies were to flee before them, and they were to be the head and not the tail, it was because they were the instruments of God to maintain His authority on the earth. No intelligent Christian can look at this trust committed to Israel, without seeing how completely contrasted it is with the position in which the believer is now placed. Is this, as has been argued, because the world has been educated to a higher point? Let us ask one question—Has God been educated? Has He discovered that things once thought to be right, are really wrong, and therefore abandoned them? The very suggestion is shocking. Whence, then, the difference? To an open eye it is plain at once. The Israelite was the minister of God's righteous government on earth; the Christian is the exponent of God's grace on earth. God's people are called to be the living manifestation of the principle on which God is acting. He is now acting in forbearance and long-suffering, and His people must exhibit forbearance and long-suffering also. In His dealings with the nations through Israel, He was acting in righteousness and judgment, and His people were bound to carry out righteousness and judgment as His instruments.

In this, however, they failed, and their failure brought out another portion of God's plan. As Israel was to be God's instrument for maintaining righteousness among the nations, there must be one able to maintain righteousness in Israel. Kingly authority, therefore, was established, and perpetual dominion was promised to the seed of David. But here again, the promise, put into the hands of the first man, only proved his inability to receive the blessing or to execute the purposes of God, and it is not until the Second Man, the true Seed of David, appears that this promise will have its fulfilment.

God's purposes of earthly government, then, are that the nations of the earth shall be ruled by a righteous earthly people under a righteous earthly sovereign. All this, entrusted to the first man, failed of accomplishment, the seed of David after the flesh, the seed of Abraham after the flesh, man after the flesh in every form, having proved his unfitness to enter into or carry out the thoughts of God. The Israelites "did not destroy the nations concerning whom Jehovah commanded them ; but were mingled among the heathen and learnt their works ; and they served their idols, which were a snare unto them" (Ps. cvi. 34-36). The descendants of David did not carry on God's righteous government in Israel. The kingdom was divided, and became the prey, instead of the head, of the surrounding nations. Instead of maintaining God's glory in the earth, through them His name was blasphemed among the Gentiles.

Everything went to ruin and confusion, and after a history marvellously illustrating the enmity of man towards God, and the long-suffering of God towards man, they were at length cast out. Israel was carried into captivity by the Assyrians, and Judah by the Babylonians. The sceptre of earthly government, abused and abased by the kings of Judah, was transferred to Nebuchadnezzar, and has ever since remained in the hands of the Gentile powers.

And here the history of Israel closes, until the times of the Gentiles are ended, and the sceptre is once more brought back to God's chosen people, in the hands of the Second Man, the true Seed of Abraham and of David, who alone is worthy or able to carry out the earthly purposes of God. Not so, however, the history of Judah. They were brought back, after seventy years' captivity, to their own country, few in numbers and feeble in strength, the servants of the Gentiles from whose dominion they were never afterwards delivered. What, then, was God's purpose in restoring this weak remnant to their own country? He was going to try man, and especially the Jews, by another test. The first man had been entrusted with God's designs and had failed. God was now bringing in the Second Man, and He was to be presented in grace to His chosen people, as well as to the world, for their acceptance or rejection. The result is well known. He in whom all God's promises centred, He by whom all God's purposes are to be carried out, the Maker of the world, the right-



ful Lord of the Gentiles, and the predicted Messiah of the Jews, appeared on earth attested by God as His Beloved Son, and the world crucified Him between two thieves. "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John i. 10, 11). The world's ignorance was culpable and deplorable enough, but the guilt of the Jews was enormously greater. Already deprived for six centuries of their proper position as a nation on account of their rebellion against God, they had now added to their guilt the fearful crime of murdering God's Son, and the fearful folly of rejecting Him in whom all their own promises and blessings were to be fulfilled. Mercy, indeed, still lingered, and the testimony of the Holy Ghost was once more presented, but the nation remained deaf to His voice, as it had done to the voice of the Messiah, and overwhelming judgment was the inevitable result.

God's plan of earthly administration, then, though revealed, has not been carried out. The people which was to be its instrument has been divided, part of it has been lost among the nations on account of its idolatry, and part of it dispersed, though not lost, on account of its rejection of the Messiah. The righteous ruler has been brought forth, but refused and crucified. But has God's purpose failed? It was not carried out by the Jews before their dispersion and captivity. It cannot be carried out by the Gentiles, for this, instead of being a fulfilment, would be a denial, of the

promises to Abraham and David. It is not in consistency with the design of the Church, whose sphere of action is altogether different, whose portion is heavenly and not earthly, and in which, as we have seen, the promises cannot have their complete fulfilment. What, then, follows? Either God's purposes concerning the earth and man upon the earth must prove boastful failures, or they must be carried out by the restoration of Judah and Israel as the centre of government, and the establishment of Christ's dominion as the ruler of the kings of the earth. Can any believer doubt which alternative is true? I shall prove in the following chapters that all this failure was foreseen of God, and that, in spite of it all, His own purpose has never changed, but that He has foretold the accomplishment of these schemes by His own Son, when man's wickedness and folly had reached their crowning height and the misery of His chosen people its lowest depth.

To question that God will do what He has said is the grossest unbelief. What are difficulties to Him? Man talks of impossibilities, and rightly enough if he measures circumstances by his own power. But the things which are impossible with men are possible with God, for with God all things are possible. There may be some, however, disposed to ask, why this long delay in the carrying out of God's purposes? Simply because until the Second Man was brought in, God was putting the first man to the test, and seeking to find some good in him. But when the Second Man was brought

in, why was not the scheme perfected at once ? To those who put this question I would ask—where would you have been, if this had taken place ? If Christ had not been rejected, how would you have stood now before God ? Or if the Holy Ghost's testimony had been accepted after the resurrection of Jesus, and He had been sent from heaven to restore Jewish dominion, where would have been the room for the Church ? What would have become of that wondrous interval in which we now live, when God is gathering a people to a rejected Christ, and making known to the principalities and powers in heavenly places, by the Church, His own manifold wisdom ? No, these delays are ordered in wondrous grace, as well as in wondrous wisdom, and surely we, the most favoured objects of His love, can only stand aside in adoring wonder as we gaze upon the unfolding of that mystery in which the very heavens behold the wisdom of God.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM ESTABLISHED ON EARTH. OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING.

I HAVE shown that God has certain purposes concerning the earth, for the fulfilment of which the appearance of the Second Man, the Lord from heaven, is necessary. But the Second Man has been rejected, His earthly people scattered, and a new thing introduced, which entirely fails to carry out the earthly purposes and promises of God. What remains, then, but that God should recall the nation, and bring back the ruler in whom these promises centre ?

We have seen, also, that Christianity, instead of converting the world or lasting to its close, will be both partial and temporary, leaving ample space, after the translation of the Church, for the working out of God's unaccomplished earthly purposes.

I now propose to look at the positive teaching of the Scriptures as to the mode in which these purposes will be carried into effect. In so doing, I shall show,

FIRST, From the Old Testament writings, that the Lord will return, as God's anointed ruler, to set up His kingdom on the earth, and to execute judgment

on His enemies, having Israel as His chosen people, and Jerusalem as His centre of government ;

SECOND, From the same authority, that at this time, repentant Israel will be delivered and blessed, and that peace and prosperity will flow out in rich streams to the whole earth ; and

THIRD, That the New Testament fully confirms the literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies.

I confine myself in this chapter to the first point, showing from Scripture that Christ's kingdom is an earthly dominion, and is brought in, not by grace, but by judgment, executed by the Lord returning to the world in manifested glory.

In the promise to David already quoted, God said, "I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more ; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more as beforetime." Again—"Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee ; thy throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam. vii. 10, 16). This promise has never been fulfilled to Israel ; and the question is whether it is to have a literal fulfilment in their history, or a spiritual fulfilment in the Church. There is nothing in the prophecy that seems to point to the Church, nor anything in the Church that seems to point to the prophecy. Naturally interpreted, the

promise is that Christ shall inherit the earthly power which David, as a mere imperfect type, wielded; that His throne shall be permanent; and that under His sway the security and blessing of Israel, only enjoyed in fading shadow before, shall truly commence.

Certainly this hope pervades David's own writings. In Psalm ii. he describes Jehovah as declaring that He has set His KING on Zion, the hill of His holiness; He calls Him His Son, and promises Him the Gentiles for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession, adding, "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." That is, the psalm shows Christ receiving from God a kingdom whose centre is Zion, the seat of earthly authority; whose sphere is the whole of the nations of the earth; and whose commencement is a terrible judgment executed upon the kings, rulers, and people, who, as the early verses of the psalm show, have been in rebellion against Him. In what way does this apply to the preaching of the gospel? How does it suit the character of the Church? Whereas it exactly coincides with the revealed purposes of God concerning Christ's earthly rule.

Psalm xviii. makes known God's goodness "to His anointed, to David and *to his seed for ever more.*" Though written as a hymn of praise for the deliverances granted to the Psalmist himself, the triumphs and glories recorded are evidently those of Christ; and the 49th verse—"Therefore will I give thanks unto



Thee, O Jehovah, among the Gentiles, and sing praises unto Thy name,"—is quoted by Paul as expressly referring to Christ. (Rom. xv. 9.) How, then, does it describe the inauguration of His glorious reign? "Thou hast given Me the necks of Mine enemies, that I might destroy them that hate Me."—Is it the necks, or the hearts, of His enemies that Christ is now seeking? Is it to save them, or to destroy them, that is His present object?—"They cried, but there was none to save them; even unto Jehovah, but He answered them not."—The word now is, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord *shall* be saved."—The psalm goes on—"Then did I beat them small as the dust before the wind; I did cast them out as the dirt of the streets. Thou hast delivered Me from the strivings of the people; and Thou hast made Me the Head of the Gentiles. A people whom I have not known shall serve Me. As soon as they hear of Me they shall obey Me, the strangers shall submit themselves unto Me. The strangers shall fade away, and be afraid out of their close places" (ver. 40-45). How perfectly this agrees with what is elsewhere told of the sudden establishment of Christ's universal sway by the judgment and destruction of His enemies! But how contrary to the grace in which He is now acting, and to the spirit enjoined on His people, who are to pray for their persecutors and to love their enemies!

The King is again named in Ps. xxi. It is evidently Christ, for He has "length of days for ever and ever,"

and is "most blessed for ever." How, then, is His reign described? "The KING trusteth in Jehovah, and through the mercy of the Most High He shall not be moved. Thine hand shall find out all Thine enemies; Thy right hand shall find out those that hate Thee. Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of Thine anger: Jehovah shall swallow them up in His wrath, and the fire shall devour them" (ver. 7-9). Surely this can only be Christ, as the true Seed of David, and God's righteous governor, taking the rule which the first man could not keep, and beginning His reign by judgments upon His enemies.

Again—"My heart is inditing a good matter. I speak of the things which I have made touching the KING; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into Thy lips; therefore God hath blessed Thee for ever" (Ps. xlv. 1, 2). Here Christ's grace and beauty are set forth. But is it by grace that He obtains His earthly authority? "Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O most Mighty, with Thy glory and Thy majesty. And in Thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness; and Thy right hand shall teach Thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the KING's enemies; whereby the people fall under Thee. Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of Thy kingdom is a right [or righteous] sceptre" (ver. 3-6). Is this the gradual triumph of the kingdom of God's grace? Or is it what all Scripture fore-

tells of the foundation of the kingdom of God's righteousness? Such is man that He who comes because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness must first establish His sway by terrible things, and by making the people fall under Him.

Psalm xlviii. celebrates the glory of Mount Zion, which is "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth," also "the city of the great KING," in whose palaces God is known for a refuge. But how does this affect the kings of the earth? They "were assembled, they passed by together; they saw it and so they marvelled; they were troubled and hastened away. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain as of a woman in travail" (ver. 4-6). Here, not only is the dominion as different as possible from the spiritual power of Christ over the heart, but its establishment, instead of being, like the spread of gospel truth, the gentlest of operations, is brought about by dreadful and violent judgments.

There is a remarkable prophecy of David's Son, which is only very partially fulfilled in Solomon, and is still to be accomplished in the true Seed, the Second Man. "He shall judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thy poor with judgment. The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness. He shall judge the poor of the people, He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. They shall fear Thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. He shall come down like rain upon

the mown grass, as showers that water the earth. In His days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow down before Him, and His enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall serve Him" (Ps. lxxii. 2-11). In no sense can the greater part of this language be applied to the Church. But as a literal fulfilment of the promises given to Abraham and David concerning the earth, as a description of a kingdom introduced by judgment and bringing in universal blessing, the delineation is divinely perfect.

In Psalm ci. we have another description of this reign of righteousness—"Whose privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off; him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer. Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with Me; he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve Me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within My house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in My sight. I will early destroy all the wicked of the land, that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of Jehovah" (ver. 5-8). This is not God speaking, for it is a song addressed to God. Yet who can say that David or Solomon thus carried out God's righteous principles of earthly rule? There

may be things in their government which typified this reign of righteousness, but assuredly, as a whole, they did not carry it out. On the other hand, what could be more opposed to Christ's present patience and long-suffering? It is the picture of His righteous government on earth.

Once more—"Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool. Jehovah shall send forth the rod of Thy strength out of Zion, rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power. . . . The Lord at Thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the Gentiles; He shall fill the places with the dead bodies; He shall wound the heads over many countries" (Ps. cx. 1-6). Is this the work of the Church? Or is it, in perfect consistency with all the other prophecies contained in the Psalms, the setting up of Christ's earthly kingdom in power and glory, and by means of devastating judgments?

The prophets continue the same strain. "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulders; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever" (Isa. ix. 6, 7). It is only by spiritualising



the whole passage that this can be understood of the Church, and when it is so understood, it contradicts all that is elsewhere said about it. Understood of the literal kingdom, it fully harmonises with the whole teaching of God's Word.

In Isaiah xi. 1-9, a further description is given of this Blessed One and His earthly reign. "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of His roots: and the Spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah, and shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of Jehovah, and He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His ears: but with righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, . . . they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth [or land] shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea." In these passages Christ has an earthly title, is seated on an earthly throne, is in connection with an earthly people, administering earthly sovereignty, executing earthly judgments, and bringing about earthly blessings. No passage can be



conceived, in every particular, more foreign to the character and object of the Church, none more admirably descriptive of the sovereignty foretold as that which is to accomplish God's purposes of blessing towards the earth.

Isaiah xxxi. describes "Jehovah of Hosts" coming "down to fight for Mount Zion and for the hill thereof," and the destruction of the Assyrian. That this had an accomplishment in the fate of Sennacherib's army is not disputed, but the salvation wrought is far larger, and followed by far more blessed consequences, than this partial and temporary deliverance. The sequence of Jehovah's intervention is thus stated in the beginning of the following chapter. "Behold, a KING shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a MAN shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Has this time come? Has Israel ever known such a King? His reign here follows upon the Lord of Host's interposition on behalf of Israel. Has such an interposition yet taken place? Let us see how the Spirit speaks of this same intervention of God elsewhere.

"Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This that is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength?" He replies—"I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." Again He is asked—"Wherefore art Thou red in Thine apparel, and Thy garments like him that

treadeth in the wine-fat?" To which He answers—"I have trodden the wine-press alone; and of the people there was none with Me; for I will tread them in Mine anger, and trample them in My fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon My garments, and I will stain all My raiment. For the day of vengeance is in Mine heart, and the year of My redeemed is come" (Isa. lxiii. 1-4). Is it thus that Christ redeems His people now? Does this describe Him who was led as a Lamb to the slaughter? Or is it the redemption of His earthly people by earthly judgments, and the foundation of His earthly throne?

Jeremiah writes—"The days come, saith Jehovah, that I will raise up unto David a righteous Branch, and a KING shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. xxiii. 5, 6). And again—"It shall come to pass in that day, saith Jehovah of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him; but they shall serve Jehovah their God and DAVID their KING, whom I will raise up unto them" (Jer. xxx. 8, 9). It is surely unnecessary to say that David their king, here raised up, is none other than David's greater Son, the Lord from heaven.

Thus also Ezekiel writes—"So shall they be My people, and I will be their God, and DAVID My servant shall be KING over them; and they all shall have One

Shepherd ; they shall also walk in My judgments, and observe My statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob My servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt ; and they shall dwell therein, even they and their children, and their children's children for ever ; *and My servant David shall be their prince for ever* " (Ezek. xxxvii. 23-25).

Daniel relates the course and fate of the Gentile monarchies, when, through Judah's sin, the dominion was handed over from her to Nebuchadnezzar. Four empires, the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman, held sway in the earth. The last becomes divided, iron mingling with clay, that is, several kingdoms of diverse origin and character, standing side by side, as in modern Europe. " And in the days of these kings, shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed ; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces, and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever " (Dan. ii. 44). This corresponds with the promise of perpetual dominion to David's seed, as also with the threat of judgment on the kings and nations of the earth. If we were to seek for a figure which did not describe the spread of Christianity, but the very reverse, we could hardly find one better suited to our purpose than the crushing power of the stone thus interpreted.

The seventh chapter of the same prophet gives still further particulars. The Gentile monarchies are there presented under the image of four beasts. Out of the

last of these four beasts grows up a great power, which exalts itself not only against men, but against the Most High, and wears out the saints of the Most High. In the midst of his wicked career, the Ancient of days appears, and executes judgment, especially on the great transgressor just named. After this, there is seen "*one like the Son of man*," "and there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him : His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. vii. 13, 14).

In perfect agreement with this is the prophet Hosea. "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without a teraphim. Afterwards shall the children of Israel return, and seek Jehovah their God, and DAVID their KING ; and shall fear Jehovah and His goodness in the latter days" (Hos. iii. 4, 5). Does anybody suppose that in these various passages David, their king, means any other than David's seed, the Lord Jesus Christ ? How utterly unmeaning to apply this title of Christ in speaking of the Church. How perfectly and beautifully suggestive in predicting the establishment of that kingdom which is the central thought in God's scheme of earthly administration.

Amos, too, foretells how the Lord will "raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen" (chap. ix. 11), and Zechariah speaks of the day when "the house of David

shall be as God, as the angel of Jehovah before them " (chap. xii. 8), prophesying, at the same time, that the Jews shall look on Him whom they pierced, and shall mourn for Him ? In another place, he says—" Behold, I will bring forth My servant, the BRANCH," and then promises that He " will remove the iniquity of that land in one day," adding—" In that day, saith Jehovah of Hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig-tree " (chap. iii. 8-10). So, too, addressing Jerusalem, he says, " Behold thy KING cometh unto thee ; He is just, and having salvation ; lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass " (chap. ix. 9). The King, however, is rejected, till at length the people, as we have seen, repent, and mourn over Him whom they pierced. Then, in the worst strait, He comes forth, as Jehovah for their deliverance, and His feet stand upon the Mount of Olives. Afterwards the dominion is established, and the nations of the earth come up to Jerusalem " to worship the KING, Jehovah of Hosts " (chap. xvi. 4-16). Here we find the same King, admitted to be Jesus when He comes riding on an ass, afterwards spoken of as Jehovah of Hosts, appearing for the deliverance of His people at the hour of their direst need, and then becoming, in Jerusalem, the object of homage to the whole earth. How perfectly this harmonises with all the glories elsewhere unfolded of this great King, at once Jehovah of Hosts, and the dependent man, with honour and majesty laid upon Him because of His perfect trust in God !



The last of the prophets, Malachi, writes as follows—“Behold I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in, behold He shall come, saith Jehovah of Hosts. But who may abide the day of His coming? And who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fuller’s soap; and He shall sit as a refiner and purify the silver” (chap. iii. 1–3). Is this the character of Christ’s first coming? Is such language applicable to the attitude He is now assuming in grace? Is it not precisely what we have found all through Scripture to be the teaching of the Spirit with respect to His coming to establish His earthly throne in righteousness and judgment?

Here, then, are a number of Old Testament prophecies all of which are admitted to refer to Christ. Both the nature of the dominion and the mode of its establishment, described in these passages, are as different as possible from anything seen or predicted under Christianity, while they are perfectly consistent with the promises of earthly blessing made to the seed of Abraham and David, and with the revealed purposes of God concerning the righteous government of the world. Is it wiser and more reverent to bow to Scripture, to accept its statements in the form in which God gives them, or to seek to twist them from their natural shape into a forced harmony with that which is not only different, but in many respects



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entirely opposed in its character and object? To do this can only result in destroying Israel's hope and obscuring the Church's. To accept them in simple faith leaves God's earthly purposes still to be accomplished, brings out in undimmed lustre the portion of the Church, and displays in fuller brightness the manifold character of the pre-eminence of Christ.

## CHAPTER V.

### ISRAEL'S RESTORATION AND BLESSING—OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING.

THE passages quoted in the last chapter prove that Christ returns to reign in righteousness, executing judgment on His enemies, and setting up His throne in Zion. But the very first text at which we glanced showed that in connection with this enduring and glorious reign of the Seed of David, the people of Israel are to be securely planted, "in a place of their own," where the children of wickedness shall afflict them no more. Let us look, then, at the teaching of Scripture on this point. We shall see how fully it confirms the literal interpretation of the passages describing the Messianic reign.

God's covenant with Abraham was—"Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. xv. 18). Again, God said to Abraham, "I will establish My covenant between Me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein

thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession " (Gen. xvii. 7, 8). When the Israelites entered into the land, it was not in virtue of this covenant, but by another covenant, according to which their possession, instead of depending on God's unconditional promise, was made to hinge on their own obedience. This was not a fulfilment of God's covenant with Abraham, and we shall see that God, instead of regarding it as such, carefully reserves His covenant with the fathers, even while distinctly foretelling the failure and dispersion of the nation under the subsequent covenant made at Mount Sinai.

Leviticus xxvi. shows the results of Israel's disobedience, bringing out all their melancholy history until they "perish among the heathen" (ver. 38). But it adds that if, in their dispersion, they shall confess their sins, "If then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity, then will I remember"—what? My covenant at Mount Sinai?—No, but "My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember, and I will remember the land" (ver. 41, 42). Restoration, then, will be on the ground of the yet unfulfilled covenant with the fathers. But it may be objected that even here the restoration is only conditional on national repentance. This is true, but in the promise to David, long afterwards, God declares that the nation *shall* be planted. This implies an undertaking on God's part that the condition shall be fulfilled.

We shall see presently that God Himself promises to bring them to the state of soul necessary for their national restoration and blessing.

In Deuteronomy xxx. the repentance of Israel is stated, not only as a condition of restoration, but as a fact. "It shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither Jehovah thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto Jehovah thy God, and shalt obey His voice according to all that I command thee this day . . . that then Jehovah thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations. . . . And Jehovah thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love Jehovah thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. And Jehovah thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee. And thou shalt return and obey the voice of Jehovah, and do all His commandments which I command thee this day. And Jehovah thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good; for Jehovah will again rejoice over thee for good, as He rejoiced over thy fathers" (ver. 1-9.)

These words were spoken to Israel as a nation, and can only be fulfilled to Israel as a nation. It is the same people who are cast out that are to be brought

back, to have their hearts circumcised, and to be again rejoiced over by the Lord for good (ver. 6-9). Such is God's distinct undertaking, not yet fulfilled, concerning Israel. Does He ever recede from it? Or does He, on the contrary, again and again, in various places and at various times, reiterate and intensify these glorious promises?

In the second Psalm, Zion is named as the place where Christ's throne will be established. In Psalms ix. and x. we behold Israel groaning under grievous oppressions, and praise offered to the Lord for deliverance. "Jehovah is king for ever and ever; the Gentiles are perished out of His land. Jehovah, Thou hast heard the desire of the humble; Thou wilt prepare their heart, Thou wilt cause Thine ear to hear" (x. 16, 17). What other country is ever spoken of as Jehovah's land but Palestine, Israel's portion? This passage then shows the Lord's perpetual kingdom, accompanied by the deliverance of the land of Israel from Gentile rule, the humbling of the people before God and His preparation of their heart.

Psalm xiv. anticipates the time of Israel's final liberation—"Oh, that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When Jehovah bringeth back the captivity of His people, Jacob shall rejoice and Israel shall be glad." Such language is extravagant if applied to the feeble remnant who returned from Babylon, and is wholly irrelevant if used about the Church. It alludes to the time concerning which all the prophets speak, of Messiah's reign and Israel's glory.

Psalm xlii. describes the hour of Israel's trouble, the waters roaring, the mountains shaking, the heathen raging, and the kingdoms in commotion. Still they can exclaim—"Jehovah of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. Come, behold the works of Jehovah, what desolations He hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the ends of the earth; He breaketh the bow and cutteth the spear in sunder; He burneth the chariot in the fire." Here the God of Jacob, a national name, is with "us"—Israel—bringing the wars and commotions of the heathen to an end by desolating judgments and establishing peace on the earth. "Be still," He adds, "and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth." And once again exultant Israel replies—"Jehovah of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah."

But the song of triumph swells again, and in the beginning of Psalm xlvii., the result of God's intervention is celebrated. "Oh clap your hands, all ye people, shout unto God with the voice of triumph. For Jehovah most high is terrible; He is a great King over all the earth. He shall subdue the people *under us*, and the nations *under our feet*. He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom He loved." And again, in the following Psalm—"Let Mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad because of Thy judgments. Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers



thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, that ye may tell it to the generation following." Here, then, we have Israel's latter history. First, she is seen in terrible affliction and oppression, but looking to God as her refuge. He comes in and stays the turmoil of the peoples by judgment, subduing them under her, establishing His own dominion, and exalting Zion and Jerusalem.

Psalm lxxviii. recounts the Lord's doings with Israel after their dispersion and national destruction. "I will bring again from Bashan : I will bring My people again from the depths of the sea : that thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and the tongue of thy dogs in the same." Is this the Church ? Did any such restoration ever take place in Israel's past history ? Benjamin and Judah, Zabulon and Naphtali, are all included in this national re-establishment. "Because of Thy temple at Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto Thee. . . . Princes shall come out of Egypt ; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God. . . . Ascribe ye strength unto God : His excellency is over Israel, and His strength is in the clouds. O God, Thou art terrible out of Thy holy places : the God of Israel is He that giveth strength and power unto His people. Blessed be God " (ver. 22-35).

At the close of the following Psalm, it is said— "For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah ; that they may dwell there and have it in possession. The seed also of His servants shall inherit it, and they that love His name shall dwell therein "

(Ps. lxi. 35, 36). Is this Israel's past history? Or what has it to do with the Church? That it is Israel's future history God's Word and faithfulness require us to believe.

So, too,—“Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come. For Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof. So the Gentiles shall fear the name of Jehovah, and all the kings of the earth Thy glory. When Jehovah shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory” (Ps. cii. 13-16). What events in the history of Israel or of the Church are described here? The spiritualising alchemy of Romish theology, borrowed by modern evangelicalism, can transmute anything into anything else. But if we are to believe what God says, instead of converting it into what we think He ought to say, this passage means that Zion will be restored, that God's glory will then be manifested, and that so the nations and kings of the earth will fear Jehovah.

The joy of Israel when this happens is told in Psalm cxxvi. “When Jehovah turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing; then said they among the Gentiles, Jehovah hath done great things for them. Jehovah hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad” (ver. 1-3). Then the people, favoured by Jehovah, are multiplied (Ps. cxxvii.); those that fear Him are blessed “out of Zion,” “see the good of Jerusalem

all the days of their life," behold their "children's children and peace upon Israel" (Ps. cxxviii). Has this time come? or has it yet to be brought in by the power and faithfulness of God?

What language, again, can be clearer than this? "Jehovah hath chosen Zion: He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest FOR EVER; here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision, I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for Mine Anointed: His enemies will I clothe with shame; but upon Himself shall His crown flourish" (Ps. cxxxii. 13-18). What could any godly Jew of David's time have understood by this prophecy? If it did not predict national blessing and glory under David's seed, what promise of God is worth possessing, or what word of God is capable of being understood?

Once more—"Let Israel rejoice in Him that made him; let the children of Zion be joyful in their KING. Let them praise His name in the dance; let them sing praises unto Him with the timbrel and harp. For Jehovah taketh pleasure in His people; He will beautify the meek with salvation. Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud upon their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance upon the Gentiles, and punishments upon the people; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with

fetters of iron ; to execute upon them the judgment written. This honour have all His saints. Praise ye the Lord" (Ps. cxlix. 2--9). These saints are evidently a people on earth. Are they the Church? Are believers now "to execute vengeance upon the Gentiles?" On the contrary, the word now is—"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath, for it is written, Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." Instead of inflicting "punishments upon the people," the servants are forbidden to pull up the tares, and commanded to let them grow till the harvest. The binding of kings and nobles is appropriate for a nation called to execute God's righteous judgments ; utterly foreign to the ways of those who are to follow in the footsteps of Christ—the meek and lowly One who "when He was reviled, reviled not again."

This may suffice for extracts from the Psalms. But no extracts can show the place which the purposes of God concerning Israel occupy in these poems. It is the object of their prayers, the spring of their hopes, the fountain of their praise. The whole book is the voice of the godly remnant of Israel heard in confession, in entreaty, in denunciation, in rejoicing, often in language most discordant with that in which the Spirit would lead the prayers and praises of the Church, but exquisitely chiming in with the sketches elsewhere furnished of God's gracious purposes towards His forsaken, but not forgotten—His blinded, but still chosen—people.

Let us now, however, turn to the words of the prophets. Isaiah's vision was "concerning Judah and Jerusalem." He is told to "make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes" (Isa. vi. 10). He inquires "Lord, how long? And He answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, and Jehovah have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land. But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten; as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof" (ver. 11-13). Here, then, is a prophecy which only receives its full accomplishment after Christ's rejection by the Jews. It foretells the total desolation of the land, the scattering and destruction of the people. But still a remnant is left, who shall return, and be the "holy seed," the real pith and substance of the nation.

About this remnant and its restoration the prophet gives us farther particulars, coupling the time of its blessing with the reign of Christ. "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people: to it shall the Gentiles seek, and His rest shall be glorious. And it shall come to pass in that day, that Jehovah will set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and



from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And He shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim; but they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west; they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab, and the children of Ammon shall obey them" (Isa. xi. 10-14). Nobody will contend that this prophecy has been fulfilled in Israel's history; and to apply it to the Church is to subject it to an amount of violence which would render all prophecy deceptive. But apply it to the future of Israel, and we find the exact counterpart of the promises and prophecies we have already seen. "The root of Jesse," the Jewish title of Christ, comes in; and in connection with His appearance the remnant, which we saw was to be preserved after the desolation of the land, is gathered back to Jerusalem and Palestine; the divisions of the people, brought in by idolatry, are healed; and the neighbouring nations, who have oppressed and despised them, are overthrown. We have all along seen that while the first man would fail, the full blessings promised to Israel would be accomplished by the coming in of the Second Man, the true Seed of David; and now we observe how His appearance at once accom-



plishes the ancient promises of God concerning this people.

But we have also seen that Israel's restoration is to be accompanied with a mighty moral change. Here, then, is what the Lord tells us about the condition of the people once more gathered back. "Therefore, saith the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of Mine adversaries, and avenge Me of mine enemies : and I will turn My hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin ; and I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning : afterward thou shalt be called The city of righteousness, the faithful city " (Isa. i. 24-26). Here we see that the judgments of God are to visit the people, that the dross of the nation is to be removed, that the rest are to learn righteousness, and that then Jerusalem is to become what God designed that it should be, as the centre of righteous government in the earth. If this portion is to be understood in its natural sense, it is plain that the spiritualising interpretation usually applied to the prophecies of Isaiah cannot stand. Is it, then, so to be understood? In the first place, the prophecy in which it occurs is expressly declared to be "concerning Judah and Jerusalem." In the next place, everybody admits that the woes and judgments denounced in this same chapter refer to the real Judah and Jerusalem. How, then, can we say that the promises immediately following and closely connected refer to an allegorical Judah and Jerusalem?

Again, the titles of God used here are the titles by which He specially makes Himself known to Israel, not the titles He assumes towards the Church. Lastly, what have righteous judges and counsellors to do with the Church? Whereas the unrighteousness of these officers was one great crime laid to the charge of Jerusalem, while their purity is an essential condition to the carrying out of God's purposes of earthly government, of which Zion is the chosen centre.

There is another thing to notice here. The purification of Jerusalem is brought about, not by grace but by power. Where is there a New Testament prophecy intimating that after the corruption of the professing Church, God would come in and restore purity by the unsparing judgments referred to in these verses? Christianity is the period of God's forbearance and long-suffering, the period when Christ is waiting at God's right hand for His foes to be made His footstool. Judgment is what characterises God's dealings with the earth. Nothing is more suitable than such language as we have quoted when bringing back His earthly people, and re-establishing His scheme of earthly government; nothing more inconsistent with the whole spirit in which He is now acting. This distinction is clearly shown in the Psalms. There we have Christ's present attitude thus described: "Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool" (Ps. cx. 1). Then follows God's principle of action when this season of expectation is closed. "Jehovah shall

send the rod of Thy strength out of Zion ; rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies. *Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power*" (ver. 2, 3). How exactly this agrees with what we have seen. During the day of God's grace, "Thy people," the Jews, are enemies. But when the day of Christ's power comes, when the rod of His strength goes out of Zion, His people are willing, and a remnant is gathered in righteousness.

But this period of Jerusalem's prosperity and righteousness under the sceptre of the Root of Jesse, is accompanied with blessing to the nations. Hear "the word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills ; and all nations shall flow into it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob ; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths ; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people ; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks : nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. ii. 2-4). This passage is expressly written concerning Judah and Jerusalem ; it presents Christ, not pleading with the nations to be reconciled to Him, but judging

and rebuking them ; it foretells the blessings that will follow an earthly reign of peace and righteousness—blessings which are never in the New Testament predicted as about to flow from the spread of the gospel or Christianity ; and it speaks, as I have before pointed out, of “last days” as different from the “last days” predicted for the professing Church as light from darkness. It refers, therefore, to the literal nation of Israel, and the literal city of Jerusalem, and declares that when the sceptre of Christ’s strength has gone out of Zion, not merely shall the nation be exalted above all others, but general blessing, and peace, and acknowledgment of God, shall prevail in the earth.

The rest of the chapter goes on to show how this period of blessing will be brought in. Is it by grace proclaimed ? No, but by fearful judgments executed. “The day of Jehovah” comes, destroying the pride of man, causing him to throw his idols to the moles and the bats, and to “go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of Jehovah, and for the glory of His majesty.” The consequence of this terrible shaking of the earth, and bringing down the pride of man, is, that “Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day” (Isa. ii. 12–22).

Isa. xiv. 1, 2, foretells that “Jehovah will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land ; and the strangers shall be joined with them . . . and they shall take them

captives, whose captives they were ; and they shall rule over their oppressors."

Again—" Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned : for she hath received of Jehovah's hand double for all her sins. The voice of Him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of Jehovah, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low ; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain ; and the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together ; for the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken it" (Isa. xl. 1-5). It is true that the cry here mentioned was raised by John the Baptist, who preceded Christ's first appearance. But John's testimony was to the kingdom, not to the Church, to the One who was to lay the axe to the root of the tree, the One who was to burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. He called upon the people to fulfil that condition of national repentance which, as shown in Leviticus, was to precede national restoration. This appeal was refused, the forerunner beheaded, the Messiah crucified. The kingdom glory and the restoration of Israel were therefore postponed, and the land left desolate. But this only delays the accomplishment of the purpose. The time will come when the voice raised in the wilderness will be listened to, when God will again comfort His people, when He



will be satisfied with the punishment He has laid upon them for their sins, and at that time His glory "shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together."

In like manner—"Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel: I will help thee, saith Jehovah, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff" (Isa. xli. 14, 15). And so too—"Thus saith Jehovah that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel—Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am Jehovah thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour; I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in My sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. Fear not, for I am with thee. I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west. I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Keep not back; bring My sons from far, and My daughters from the ends of the earth" (Isa. xliii. 1-6). And once more—"Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art My servant: I have formed thee; thou art My servant: O Israel, thou shalt not



be forgotten of Me. I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins : return unto Me, for I have redeemed thee" (Isa. xliv. 21, 22).

In the last foregoing passages, God, speaking by the national name of Jehovah, has said thrice over concerning Israel as a nation that He has redeemed it. Yet the accredited interpretation is, that He has deceived Israel with false hopes, and that when He spoke of Israel, He really meant something entirely different ! Is it credible that Christians should dare to impute such deception to the One "who cannot lie" ? If God could so cruelly deceive Israel, what reason have we to believe He is not equally deceiving us ? The bare suggestion is shocking, and yet it is the inevitable inference arising out of the Romish and evangelical interpretation. But again, in one of these passages God speaks of making Israel a sharp threshing instrument, in another of gathering her sons and daughters from the ends of the earth, and in the third of her return to Him with her transgressions forgiven. All this exactly befits Israel's state. But is the Church a sharp threshing instrument ? Has the Church ever been scattered to the ends of the earth ? Or is the Church ever spoken of as having been estranged from God and coming back forgiven ? Such are the contradictions involved in the ordinary interpretation.

Quotations might be multiplied without end, but I select a few only. "The redeemed of Jehovah shall

return and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their head : they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away " (Isa. li. 11). When will the Church come to Zion ? Or if Zion be spiritualised into heaven, how can the Church "return" where it has never been ? "Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk of the hand of Jehovah, the cup of His fury" (ver. 17). Israel has drunk the cup of Jehovah's fury, but when has the Church done so ? "Thus saith thy Lord, Jehovah, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of His people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of My fury ; thou shalt no more drink it again. But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee " (ver. 22, 23). Applied to Israel, this is beautiful, consistent with other scripture, and adapted to her circumstances. Applied to the Church, the passage is absolutely without meaning.

How exquisite, also, when addressed to Israel, but how false and preposterous, if referred to the Church, is the following promise : "Thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband, Jehovah of hosts is His name, and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel. . . . For a small moment have I forsaken thee " [for what "small moment" has Christ forsaken the Church ?] ; "but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid My face from thee for a moment ; but

with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee " (Isa. liv. 4-8).

How sweet, too, the words of comfort directed to Israel in this passage. "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of Jehovah is risen upon thee. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but Jehovah shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. . . . Thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. . . . The sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee. . . . Thy gates shall be open continually, they shall not be shut day nor night, that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish. . . . The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee, and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of Jehovah, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations" (Isa. lx. 1-15).

The last portion of this prophet is so full of the theme that selection is almost impossible, but the above extracts, voluminous in themselves, though scanty in proportion to the matter out of which they are taken, will suffice to show the teaching of God's

Word as delivered by this inspired teacher. Let us look, then, very briefly, at the words of the other prophets. I begin with those who wrote before the fall of Jerusalem.

Hosea, after foretelling Israel's rejection under the parable of Lo-ammi, not My people, adds—"Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered"—the very promise given to Abraham; "and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not My people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God" (Hos. i. 9, 10). And in the closing chapter of his prophecy, he thus writes—"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for Mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return: they shall revive as the corn and grow as the vine; the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon" (Hos. xiv. 4-7).

Joel describes the time when the Lord will sit to judge all the heathen round about. Then "Jehovah also shall roar out of Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake; but Jehovah will be the hope of His people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So shall ye know that I am Jehovah your God dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain. Then shall Jerusalem be holy, and

there shall no stranger pass through her any more" (Joel iii. 16, 17).

Amos foretells that Jehovah "will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth." The sinners shall die, but God "will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the nations." Moreover, "I will bring again the captivity of My people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith Jehovah thy God" (Amos ix. 9-15).

Obadiah foretells the judgment awaiting Edom: "But upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions;" and the captivity of Israel "shall possess the cities of the south. And saviours shall come up on Mount Zion to judge the Mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be Jehovah's" (Obad. 17-21).

Micah repeats the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the "last days," adding—"In that day, saith Jehovah, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; and I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was



cast far off a strong nation ; and Jehovah shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever. And thou, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion ; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem ” (Mic. iv. 6-8).

Zephaniah bids Israel wait till the Lord rises up to vengeance on her enemies, “for *then* will I turn to the people a pure language.” Then they shall be gathered from Ethiopia, and “the remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity.” “Sing, O daughter of Zion,” he adds ; “shout, O Israel ; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. Jehovah hath taken away thy judgments, He hath cast out thine enemy : the King of Israel, even Jehovah, is in the midst of thee ; thou shalt not see evil any more ” (Zeph. iii. 8-15).

The prophets of the captivity write in the same strain. “Turn, O backsliding children, saith Jehovah ; for I am married unto you ; and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion ; and I will give you pastors according to Mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. . . . At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of Jehovah, and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of Jehovah, to Jerusalem ; neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart. In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out



of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers" (Jer. iii. 14-18).

Ezekiel writes—"I will take you from among the Gentiles, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you" (Ezek. xxxvi. 24, 25). The next chapter describes the vision of the dry bones, concerning which the prophet is told that "these bones are the whole house of Israel." But the Lord says—"Behold, O My people, I will open your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel, and ye shall know that I am Jehovah" (ver. 11-13). Then follows the vision signifying the union of Judah and Israel, which is thus explained—"I will take the children of Israel from among the Gentiles, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one KING shall be king to them all; and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all" (ver. 21, 22).

Daniel foretells the course of Gentile monarchy, ending with the complete destruction of their power, and the setting up of the kingdom of the Son of Man; when "the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High"

(Dan. vii. 27). These are persons on earth, for they are described two verses before as persecuted by the power symbolised in the "little horn." From this persecution they are saved by the judgment of this blasphemer, and the establishment of Messiah's kingdom. This fearful trial and deliverance are described further on. "There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time; and at that time *thy people* shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Dan. xii. 1).

There are three still later prophets, whose writings date from after the partial restoration of the Jews under Zerubbabel. Of these, Haggai's short prophecy is more occupied with the present than the future. But he foretells a mighty event. "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, Yet once, a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory" (Hag. ii. 6, 7). There was no such shaking at Christ's first coming, and on His coming at the end of the world, the temple at Jerusalem will not be filled with His glory. At His second coming we have seen that there will be a mighty shaking, fearful judgments, and a display in and from Jerusalem of His kingdom glory.

Zechariah is more occupied with the future. He writes—"Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: for

I, saith Jehovah, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her. . . . Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion ; for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith Jehovah ; and many nations shall be joined to Jehovah in that day . . . and Jehovah shall inherit Judah His portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again " (Zech. ii. 4-12). So also—" I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them again to place them ; for I have mercy upon them ; and they shall be as though I had not cast them off ; for I am Jehovah their God, and will hear them " (Zech. x. 6).

Malachi predicts, as we have seen, the Lord's appearing, " like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap," so terrible that he asks—" Who may abide the day of His coming ? " The effect of His return is that He purifies the house of Levi, so that they " offer unto Jehovah an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto Jehovah, as in the days of old, and as in former years. And I will come near to you to judgment. . . . For I am Jehovah, I change not ; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed " (Mal. iii. 3-6).

Such is the unvarying testimony of the Hebrew prophets. Did God mean those to whom it was given to understand it in its natural sense, or not to understand it at all ? Would it have been possible for any Jew to have understood it in any other sense than as a magnificent series of prophecies concerning

his own nation ? And is it credible that any believer in the Lord Jesus can maintain, that when God used language which could only arouse such hopes, He was mocking them with hollow and delusive expectations ?

## CHAPTER VI.

### ISRAEL'S RESTORATION AND BLESSING—OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING—(*continued*).

I PROPOSE now to notice a few special features connected with the Messiah's reign and Israel's glory—again leaving Scripture to speak for itself.

I. This restoration is under a new covenant. “Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which My covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith Jehovah. But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, saith Jehovah, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for all shall know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah; for I

will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. xxxi. 31-34).

Thus there are three covenants; the first, an unconditional one, with Abraham, not yet fulfilled; the second, a conditional one, with Israel, which prevented the accomplishment of the first, by making it contingent on the people's obedience; the third, an unconditional one, also with Israel, which sets aside the second, and so renders possible the fulfilment of the first. But though the condition of the Sinai covenant is to be removed, national restoration and the fulfilment of the unconditional covenant with Abraham is not to take place until the time of national repentance. Though the promise is absolute, yet the nation must be in a fit state before it is fulfilled. God, then, engages to bring it into a fit state. Instead of leaving Israel to keep the law in their own strength, He covenants to give them power to keep it. He makes a covenant with Judah and Israel to bring them to the state of heart in which His promise, made to Abraham, can be righteously carried out. He must have a righteous nation; He, therefore, comes in Himself to make it righteous.

This covenant is also named by Isaiah. "The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith Jehovah. As for Me, this is My covenant with them, saith Jehovah; My Spirit that is upon thee, and My words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of



the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith Jehovah, from henceforth and for ever" (Isa. lix. 20, 21).

Ezekiel also says, speaking of the nation as a whole, and of Judah and Israel as her two children, "I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. *Then* thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed, when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger; and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but *not by thy* covenant. And I will establish *My* covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am Jehovah" (Ezek. xvi. 60-62). Israel's covenant, made at Sinai, could effect no restoration, but God promises to make a covenant, to endure for ever, in virtue of which, national restoration and acknowledgment of Himself should be brought about.

II. And if God engages to write His law in the heart of the people, He promises them at the same time the outpouring of His Spirit. Isaiah foretells national desolation "*until* the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a wilderness" (Isa. xxxii. 15). This is not the baptism of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, for it is to put an end to the desolation of Jerusalem, and to be followed by millennial blessings.

But the most striking prophecy of this marvellous national event is to be found in the writings of Joel. He speaks of the restoration of the nation, and adds—"It shall come to pass afterwards, that I will pour

out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My Spirit. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of Jehovah come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of Jehovah shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance" (Joel ii. 28-32).

Now this prophecy did not receive its fulfilment at Pentecost. Peter's object in quoting it on that occasion was not to show that it was then fulfilled, but to point out to the scoffing Jews that the miraculous power suddenly bestowed was nothing more than their own prophets had foretold as the effect of the Spirit's outpouring. There were no wonders in heaven, no blood, or fire, or vapour of smoke; so the apostle could not possibly mean that the prophecy was then really fulfilled. Moreover, both the context and the language of the prophecy itself show that its proper accomplishment was to be at the time of Israel's restoration; that it did not refer—though some parts of it might be applicable—to the baptism of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost.

That the giving of the Spirit is accompanied with national blessings and return to the land is also shown by the words of Ezekiel. "I will put My Spirit

within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers ; and ye shall be My people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses ; and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you " (Ezek. xxxvi. 27-29.)

III. And this brings us to the great physical effects of this reign of righteousness. The world into which man was created was one in complete subjection to himself, one in which disease and death were unknown, one in which the earth brought forth all its fruits abundantly. Sin reversed this. The headship of man was shaken, disease, death, and sterility introduced. From that moment all creation has groaned and travailed in pain together. But the effect of the cross is to lay a righteous foundation for the reconciliation of all things (Col. i. 20), and at the manifestation of the sons of God, "the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God " (Rom. viii. 19-21). Now this deliverance, this reversal of the condition of things brought in by sin, is clearly predicted in the old prophets.

Thus the curse of sterility, though partially removed at the time of the flood, still continued in large measure ; for the abundant harvests promised to Israel were merely conditional on their obedience, and like all other blessings held by such a tenure, were

lost through the nation's unfaithfulness. Thorns and briers were to be brought forth—the fruits of sin. But when the reign of righteousness begins, “instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree : and it shall be to Jehovah for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off” (Isa. lv. 13). Again—“I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together; that they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of Jehovah hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it” (Isa. xli. 18–20). So too, “The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose” (Isa. xxxv. 1).

Ezekiel also foretells the time when they shall say, “This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden” (Ezek. xxxvi. 35); and Amos speaks of the days when “the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt” (Amos ix. 13). So too, Joel, “In that day the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the house of Jehovah, and shall water the valley of Shittim” (Joel iii. 18).

Again, the ferocity of the wild beasts is restrained, and man's supremacy established. To the Son of

man—the Second Man—all nature is made subject, “all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field ; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea ” (Ps. viii. 7, 8). Hence, “the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together : and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed ; their young ones shall lie down together ; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’s den ” (Isa. xi. 6–8).

But still further, longevity will be restored ; if, indeed, death, save as the judgment of sin, will not be abolished, and the age of man prolonged to the full period of Christ’s reign. “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth ; and the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create ; for behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem and joy in My people ; and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days ; for the child shall die an hundred years old, but the sinner, being an hundred years old, shall be accursed ” (Isa. lxv. 17–20). Now this is not heaven, nor the new creation spoken of in the New Testament, for in neither of those has sin or death any



place. Indeed before God makes all things new as foretold in the Revelation, the last enemy, death, has been destroyed. (Rev. xx. 14.) The Old Testament never gets beyond the world, for that is its sphere, and the reign of Christ is the type, the partial accomplishment, of that perfect reconciliation, the full fruits of which will be seen only in the new heaven and the new earth spoken of in the Revelation and the Epistle of Peter. In those new heavens and new earth righteousness dwells; in the new heavens and new earth of Isaiah righteousness only reigns, judging sin and repressing it, but not bringing it entirely to an end.

But though the results are only partial as compared with the full accomplishment of God's purposes revealed in the New Testament, they are yet most blessed and most appropriate. It is true that they are ordinarily understood as merely poetical figures of spiritual blessing, and it is even thought by some unworthy of God, or impossible as a physical fact, to bring in such results as those named. Are the evils introduced, however, the punishment which God inflicted on account of sin? Are they the special scourges by which He visited His chosen earthly people for their disobedience and rebellion? If they are, the One who had power to bring them in has power to take them away. If it was worthy of Him to bring them in, it is worthy of Him to take them away. If the one was His righteous answer to sin, the other is His righteous answer to the cross. When God is dealing with the earth, earthly calamities have always marked His displeasure, and



earthly blessings His approval. We forget that what philosophers call the order of nature is really its disorder ; that this groaning creation came from the hand of God “very good ;” and that its present condition is the anarchy of sin, not the design of the Creator. Now that the Lamb of God has borne the sin of the world, God can remove the curse, and reconcile the disordered creation to Himself. This He will do perfectly in the new creation ; but partially in the kingdom glory and blessedness of His anointed Son.

IV. But besides the general descriptions of the prosperity and glory of Israel under the reign of the Messiah, we have somewhat minute details of many features of their national polity. The concluding chapters of Ezekiel’s prophecy give the plan of the temple, down to the most minute details, describe the sacrifices offered, the order of priests instituted, the return of the glory of Jehovah to dwell in the temple, the dimensions and divisions of the reconstructed city, the fresh arrangement of the land among the tribes, and a number of similar points, all perfectly intelligible if we let Scripture interpret itself, but all mysterious and difficult to the last degree if treated as an allegory descriptive of the blessings to be enjoyed under Christianity.

It is easy enough to understand a general description of the Church under the figure of a temple, a city, or the people Israel. Indeed all these figures are applied to it in the New Testament. But in Ezekiel

it is not such a general description of a temple. All the details are arranged with an architectural precision wholly unsuited to allegory, but most necessary in describing the plan of a real building. The glory of Jehovah, as beheld in the first chapter of Ezekiel's prophecy, which was seen to quit the temple and Jerusalem in the tenth chapter, is again, after long absence, seen to fill this reconstructed temple (chap. xlv. 4). His voice ordains that certain of the Levites, whose fathers had fallen into idolatry, should not come near to minister; while "the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of My sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from Me, they shall come near to Me, to minister unto Me, and they shall stand before Me to offer unto Me the fat and the blood" (chap. xlv. 10-15). The Lord also defines the garments which these priests shall wear, the class of persons they shall marry, the judicial functions they shall perform, and the portion of the offerings they shall receive. Here, to accept God's Word as meaning what it says, makes everything simple, to attempt to allegorise it is to throw it into hopeless confusion.

To some minds it may present a difficulty that animal sacrifices should be again spoken of. But an animal sacrifice was never in itself of any value as an offering. It was but a type of the true sacrifice, and such a type may be just as suitable in remembrance of the sacrifice as in anticipation. We observe the Lord's supper, showing His body given and His blood shed. In an earthly religion the types are of a more

earthly character, and the actual shedding of blood, not in renewal, but in remembrance, of the sacrifice of Himself made by Jesus to God, will be the divinely-appointed way of celebrating this event.

Certain of the feasts also are reinstituted. "In the first month, in the fourteenth day of the month, ye shall have the passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten" (Ezek. xlv. 21). And, "in the seventh month, in the fifteenth day of the month, shall he do the like in the feast of seven days" (ver. 25). This is the feast of tabernacles. Thus two out of the three feasts instituted by the law are to be renewed, but neither here nor elsewhere is any mention made of the feast of Pentecost. Surely if this were symbolical of the Church, the omitted feast would be most prominent. It was the feast of first-fruits, and as such the Holy Ghost was given on that day to form the Church, the first-fruits of the work of Christ. This, then, is the very reason of its omission. The full significance of this beautiful type is exhausted in the Church, and it no longer appears, therefore, after the Church's removal, among the institutions of the earthly people. Zechariah tells us a still further detail. The passover will apparently be observed by the Jews alone; but "every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem, shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, Jehovah of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles" (Zech. xiv. 16). Should this homage be omitted, the penalty is "no rain;" except in the case of Egypt, where, as there is

no rain, a plague is sent instead (ver. 17-19). How utterly inapplicable all these minute and interesting details are to the Church of God; how beautifully appropriate to the literal reign of the Messiah over restored Israel.

Ezekiel goes on to describe the dimensions of the city and its various divisions. Now in Revelation xxi. we have the Church, called also "the bride, the Lamb's wife," described under the figure of a city. The slightest examination of that account will show that it is not the description of a place, but a mere symbolical setting forth of the heavenly glories and blessedness of the Church. Its dimensions, its cubical form, its position, its materials, its foundations, its gates—its very definition, not as the dwelling place of the Church, but as the Church itself—plainly show that this dazzling vision was not a sight of heaven, but a magnificent figure of the moral glories of the body of Christ, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. Compare this with the city described in Ezekiel. The latter is large, but suited to the dimensions of the land: splendid, but with nothing exceeding earthly splendour; it has a temple, while the other has none. In every particular it presents a contrast rather than suggests a comparison. How is this? Simply because they describe totally different things. The one is the plan of a splendid earthly city; the other the figure of a portion of the redeemed in heavenly glory.

Again Ezekiel gives the limits of the land occupied,

and its division among the various tribes. The land, instead of being the restricted portion taken possession of by the Israelites of old, corresponds far more nearly with the large promise given to Abraham. The distribution of the tribes over this extended area is entirely different from that made by Joshua and his fellow assessors. What meaning has all this when applied to the Church? Understand it literally, as every spiritual Israelite must have understood it, and it presents no difficulty whatever, but simply furnishes interesting details of that blessed period when Israel, delivered from her enemies, and restored to Jehovah's favour, shall enjoy under the Messiah's rule the yet unfulfilled promises made to Abraham and David.

## CHAPTER VII.

### CHRIST'S REIGN AND ISRAEL'S RESTORATION.

#### NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING.

THE question now naturally arises, whether the New Testament confirms the Old Testament prophecies as to Israel's blessing and the Messianic kingdom, or whether it diverts the blessings to the Church, and makes the kingdom a spiritual reign ?

The birth of Jesus was thus announced :—" Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest : and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David, and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever ; and of His kingdom there shall be no end " (Luke i. 31-33). In the same strain Mary prophesies—" He hath holpen His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy ; as He spake to our fathers, to Abraham and to His seed for ever " (ver. 54, 55). Shortly afterwards Zacharias says—" Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David ;



as He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets which have been since the world began : that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us ; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant ; the oath which He sware to our father Abraham, that He would grant unto us that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life " (ver. 68-75). Again the angels, speaking to the shepherds, say, " Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to *all the people* (that is, Israel, not "all people," as in our translation); for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord " (Luke ii. 10, 11). Here we have Israel, an earthly people : the throne of David, an earthly throne ; perpetual dominion, the promise to David's seed ; in fact, throughout these prophecies, the titles given, the offices described, and the blessings foretold, are altogether of a national character.

Concerning Christ's birth, Matthew says (i. 22, 23) — " All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel ; which being interpreted is, God with us." In the passage here quoted (Isa. vii. 14), the birth of Emmanuel is the sign given to the king of Judah of national deliverance, and the destruction of national enemies.

In the next chapter the enemy comes up against Judah—"He shall reach even to the neck, and the stretching out of His wings shall fill the breadth of Thy land, O Emmanuel. Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces" (Isa. viii. 8, 9). Here again, then, in the only other passage where the name occurs, it is suggestive of kingly dominion, Israel's deliverance, and Gentile judgments. The names of Christ in Scripture are always significant, and the name here set as the frontispiece of Matthew's Gospel, spoke, to every Jewish ear, not of the Lamb led to the slaughter, but of the Victor ruling in the midst of His enemies.

So, too, the mission of the wise men of the East is not to the meek and lowly One, but to Him "that is born King of the Jews"—a foretaste of the homage of the nations when "the kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents, the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts" (Ps. lxxii. 10). In the same spirit, the chief priests and scribes, when asked about His birth-place, reply by quoting a prophecy of Micah, where He is spoken of as "the governor" and the ruler of "My people Israel." Thus prominently are kingly lineage and dignity brought out in the accounts of His birth and childhood.

The Gospel of Matthew records God's dispensational ways, showing how the great national sin of Christ's rejection led to the postponement of Jewish hopes, and an alteration in the form of the kingdom. Chapter xii. describes the nation conspiring against Jesus,

who pronounces their doom, declaring the last state of the wicked generation to be worse than the first. Hence, in the next chapter, He will only speak to the multitudes in parables, quoting against them the prophecy in which Isaiah foretells that their eyes should be blinded and their hearts made gross. So far, however, is this prophecy from predicting their permanent blindness and rejection, that it expressly declares the term of their punishment and the restoration of a remnant. But while thus turning from the multitude, and foretelling their temporary rejection, He unfolds to His disciples, to whom it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom, the new and mysterious form in which this kingdom was about to be set up. Does this mystery, then, endure, like the prophetic kingdom, to the end of the world? Is it, like that kingdom, brought in by judgment, administered in righteousness, and resplendent in glory? On the contrary, its duration is only to "the end of the age"—the period when the prophetic kingdom will begin; it is introduced, not by judgment, but by the quiet sowing of seed; it is administered, not in righteousness, but in forbearance, the tares growing with the wheat; and instead of manifesting God's glory on earth, the whole mass becomes leavened with corruption. It is different in form from the kingdom promised, and is limited in time till that kingdom is introduced. Instead of superseding the prophetic kingdom, it merely fills up the interval till the Jews are ready to receive it.

In chapter xvi. Jesus formally abandons, as to public testimony, His Jewish character of Messiah (ver. 20), and takes up, instead, the new title of "Son of the living God" (ver. 16), on which He says that He will build His Church. He foretells the kingdom of heaven in a new form, not in glory but in weakness; not connected with the crown of earthly power, but with the cross of earthly rejection. But is the outward kingdom, therefore, abandoned? At the close of His discourse, Jesus adds—"There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom" (ver. 28). Another evangelist says—"till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark ix. 1); and another, "till they see the kingdom of God" (Luke ix. 27). Now in each case, these remarkable words are immediately followed by the story of the transfiguration. Surely this suggests, that the transfiguration was a prophetic display of the kingdom in power made to chosen witnesses, at the moment when it was for a time to be set aside by the mysterious form in which the kingdom now appears. But what the gospels suggest, Peter expressly states. "We have not," he says, "followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the *power and coming* of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this

voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount" (2 Pet. i. 16-18). The transfiguration, therefore, was God's witness to the "power and coming" of Christ, the proof furnished that, notwithstanding the postponement of the Jewish hope, the prophetic kingdom was still as sure in His purposes as ever, and that Jesus, now rejected in His grace, would return in power and glory to revive the kingdom in all its outward display.

In Matthew xix. 28, Jesus tells His disciples—"In the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." The Son of man sitting in the throne of His glory, is the very thing shown to Daniel as about to happen after the destruction of the Gentile powers (Dan. vii. 14). It is the very thing which, as we have seen, all the promises and prophecies, all the revealed counsels of God as to earthly government or blessing, led the disciples to anticipate. It is the very thing of which Gabriel spoke to Mary, and of which Zechariah prophesied. It was to happen at the "regeneration," the very "times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts iii. 21). It was to be connected with Israel, the invariable centre of God's purposes when He asserts His governmental authority upon the earth. Could words more clearly indicate the establishment of the Messianic kingdom in visible power and glory?



Indeed the name "Son of man" is, when applied to Christ in the Old Testament, always used in connection with dominion and dignity. It is the Son of man who has all things put under His feet (Ps. viii. 6); who, as the Man of God's right hand, delivers downcast Israel (Ps. lxxx. 17); and who receives the kingdom from the Ancient of days (Dan. vii. 13, 14). In the New Testament it is only used by Jesus in speaking of Himself. Taken in connection with the passages named, it could convey to His hearers no other thought than of Him whom God had appointed to exercise authority on earth; who, though with no place to lay His head, though rejected, betrayed, and crucified, was yet clothed with power to forgive sins, was Lord of the Sabbath, would appear in the clouds of heaven with great glory, for the destruction of His enemies and the deliverance of His people. In other words, it was a title suggestive of the Jewish hopes; and "the coming of the Son of man" is always spoken of in connection with His appearance to set up the Messianic kingdom.

In chapter xxi. Jesus enters Jerusalem meek and lowly, riding on an ass. A portion of the people respond, hailing Him as King, as Son of David, and applying to Him the language of Psalm cxviii.—"Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." This, as the psalm shows, is the language in which the Jews acknowledge their rejected Messiah, when the stone which the builders rejected becomes the head-stone of the corner (ver. 22-26). At this time,



however, it is used only by babes and sucklings, the weak things of the world, while the nation as a whole once more refuses Him. But this refusal is not final, as our Lord's words plainly show ; for while declaring that, in consequence of their guilt, their house would be left unto them desolate, He adds,—“I say unto you, ye shall not see Me henceforth.” For how long ? Till the end of the world ? No, but, “*till ye shall say*, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord ” (Matt. xxiii. 38, 39). This language they had refused when uttered by babes and sucklings, but when they adopt it, they will see Jesus again, and their house will no longer be left desolate.

In the same chapter xxi. the Lord asks the Jews —“Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner ; this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes ? Therefore, I say unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken ; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder ” (ver. 42-44). Here are three prophecies concerning the stone, those who fall on it, and those on whom it falls. The first, from Psalm cxviii. 22, 23, shows that the stone, though at first refused by Israel, afterwards becomes the head of the corner. The second, from Isaiah viii. 14, declares Christ to be “for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel.” But mark what follows.

The testimony is bound up, the law sealed among His disciples, and the prophet waits on the Lord who hides His face from Israel. Then come deep anguish and darkness, from which the people emerge and joy before the Lord, "as men rejoice when they divide the spoil;" "for unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder" (Isa. ix. 3, 6). Thus Isaiah's words coincide with our Lord's—the nation which stumbles on the stone is broken, not destroyed. The third prophecy is from Daniel ii., and foretells a very different fate for those on whom the stone falls; for while Israel, stumbling on the stone, is broken, but afterwards healed, the Gentile powers, which for a time have taken the dominion out of Israel's hands, are struck by the stone, "are broken to pieces together, and become like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors" (Dan. ii. 35).

In Matthew xxiii. Jesus says that the Jews shall not see Him again *till* they shall say—"Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord;" in other words that they *will* see Him, when their predicted repentance shall take place. The disciples then (xxiv. 3) ask—"What shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the age?" This can only refer to the coming just before named, when the Jews should be prepared to receive Him. Of His coming for His saints they as yet knew nothing. And they manifestly are asking not about the end of the world (though our translation thus renders it), but about "the end of the age,"

when Jewish rejection would terminate and Messiah's reign begin.

Nor does the Lord's reply point to the end of the world. It is a prediction of woes, partially accomplished in the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, but awaiting a far more fearful fulfilment when the "abomination of desolation," spoken of by Daniel, is set up, and during the great tribulation foretold by the same prophet. But in their darkest hour, there shall suddenly "appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven : and then shall all the tribes of the earth [or land] mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. xxiv. 30).

Now, that this is not the coming at the end of the world, is obvious from the two Old Testament prophecies quoted. The great tribulation spoken of by Daniel precedes Israel's deliverance. "There shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time ; and *at that time thy people shall be delivered*, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Dan. xii. 1). The time of national mourning for Him whom they had pierced, described by Zechariah, is also, not at the end of the world, but when the Lord "shall defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem," and shall "seek to destroy all the nations that come against" her (Zech. xii. 8-12). So that this prophecy of our Lord's does not describe the end of the world, but Israel's deliverance, or the end of the age. And the following parables, of the

steward, the virgins, the talents, and the judgment of the nations, all describe events happening at the coming of Christ either for His saints or to receive His earthly kingdom.

The other Gospels are not so distinctly dispensational in their teaching as Matthew's. In the Gospel of Luke, however, we get two remarkable expressions which help to throw light upon this subject. There Jesus is asked when the predicted destruction of Jerusalem and the temple will take place. In reply He details events which are generally admitted to be those preceding and accompanying the sack of Jerusalem by the Roman armies under Titus. The result is thus related—"They shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, *until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*" (Luke xxi. 7-24). He then foretells signs in heaven, distresses on earth, and the appearance of the Son of Man "with power and great glory;" adding—"When these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads; *for your redemption draweth nigh*" (ver. 25-28). Now throughout this discourse, which is related by all the three synoptic evangelists, though with very important variations, the disciples are treated as Jews interested in and asking about the future history of their people. Bearing this in mind, let us inquire what the portions we have quoted mean. They say that Jerusalem is to be under Gentile rule "until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled;" that then fearful

troubles arise, Christ appears "in power and great glory," and "your redemption"—that is, Jewish deliverance—takes place. Compare this with the two prophecies of Daniel. In both he traces "the times of the Gentiles," in both he describes Christ's appearance in power and glory, in both this appearance ends in the destruction of Gentile power, and the establishment of Messiah's kingdom; while in one of the visions, the saints who have been persecuted share the kingdom. In other words the redemption of the faithful remnant of Israel takes place at the same time as the setting up of Messiah's rule. Can there be a doubt that our Lord's discourse here describes the same period and the same event foretold by the Hebrew prophet?

Such, then, is the testimony of the Gospels. Instead of diverting the Old Testament prophecies to the Church, it distinctly reserves them for Israel, thus demonstrating the oneness of God's purposes, vindicating the truth of His promises, and overthrowing the false system of interpretation by which these promises are obscured or nullified.

In the Acts we read that just before our Lord's ascension His disciples ask Him a question—"Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Now surely if the disciples were still cherishing a vain delusion—if the kingdom never was to be restored to Israel, but Israel's portion was to be spiritualised away into the Church's blessing—Jesus would at least have abstained from giving an answer



to this question which would tend to foster their fallacious hopes. Instead of hinting, however, that these expectations were unfounded, He replies in a manner distinctly calculated to confirm them. He says—"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power" (Acts i. 6, 7). Both the New and the Old Testaments foreshadow a period of indefinite duration, during which the Jews are deprived of their national blessings, and this text tells us that it is not yet in God's purposes to reveal the time of their restoration; but so far from saying that this restoration should not take place, the language used clearly implies that it will.

The re-establishment and deliverance of Israel have, however, been shown to be connected with the return of the Messiah, and the chapter we are now looking at bears a distinct testimony on this point likewise. No sooner is Jesus caught up than two men stand by the disciples "in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (ver. 10, 11).

The personal return of Jesus for the restoration of Jewish privileges, and at the time of national repentance, is still more strikingly shown a little further on in the same apostolic history. We there find Peter, taught by the Holy Ghost, urging the nation to repentance by this very promise. "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out,



*in order that* [I give the version admitted to be correct by all scholars] “*the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you ; whom the heaven must receive UNTIL the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began*” (Acts iii. 19–21). What are “the times of restitution of all things?” They cannot be the end of the world, for that is the time of destruction of all things. Besides, which of the prophets had spoken of this event? Are not the prophets full of “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow?” When Peter addressed the Jews, the sufferings were past, but the glory was to come. This glory, then, of which all the prophets have spoken, is the “restitution of all things” mentioned by Peter—of the temple, of the kingdom, of the throne of David—all which the Jews hoped for, all which, at the time of their repentance, they will have fulfilled. And at that time God will send Jesus Christ once more from heaven. He is not gone there till the end of the world, but till these times come, and when they are come, He will return to the earth, be seen by His people, and “restore again the kingdom to Israel.”

In the epistles comparatively little is said on this subject. We find, however, that “the promises” are still spoken of as the portion of Paul’s “kinsmen according to the flesh,” and this in the very chapters which explain God’s reason for their temporary exci-

sion. These words were penned after Israel had been cut off, and could have no meaning at all except in prospect of her national restoration. No refining can make the Israelites here to mean the Church, for already the Church was in existence, and the Israelites, Paul's kinsmen according to the flesh, are spoken of in contrast with the Church. Yet while thus speaking of them, and while mourning over their unbelief, he says that to them "the promises" still pertain (Rom. ix. 4).

But in a subsequent chapter he goes further than this. He declares that the riches of the Gentiles, which are partially realised by the diminishing of Israel, will be completely obtained by their fulness (Rom. xi. 12); that "all Israel shall be saved, as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (ver. 26); and that though, "as concerning the gospel, they are enemies," yet, "as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes, for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (ver. 28, 29). It has been already shown that these passages cannot refer to the conversion of the Jews to Christianity. I may now point out that the restoration spoken of is national and local, is in fulfilment of God's gifts to the fathers and in connection with national repentance, is accompanied by the return of the Messiah, and results in blessings to all the nations of the earth. In a word, it corresponds with all that the prophets foretell, and the Gospels and Acts con-

firm. The Epistle to the Hebrews says,—“Unto the angels hath He not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man that Thou art mindful of him? or the Son of man, that Thou visitest him? Thou madest Him a little lower than the angels; Thou crownedst Him with glory and honour, and didst set Him over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things in subjection under His feet” (Heb. ii. 5-8). The Psalm quoted adds, “all sheep and oxen,” and “whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas” (Ps. viii. 7, 8), thus showing that this “world to come” does not mean heaven, nor yet the “new earth” in which there is “no more sea” (Rev. xxi. 1). The word used for “world” is one, moreover, which always means the inhabited earth. This world, then, is to be brought into complete and absolute subjection to Christ, “for in that He put all in subjection under Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him.”

May not this, however, be by the conversion of the world? The language forbids it, for where is the Church spoken of as put under Christ’s feet? This implies the ascendancy, not of love, but of power—enemies conquered, not enemies reconciled. Besides, what meaning would attach, on such an interpretation, to the dominion given over “sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field?” But the character of the dominion is also shown by other passages. “To which of the angels,” asks the apostle, “said He

at any time, Sit on My right hand until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool?" (Heb. i. 13). And again—"This Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool" (Heb. x. 12, 13). These are quotations from Psalm cx. Taking the passages together, they show Jesus undergoing death, seated at God's right hand, and waiting for the time when all things shall be put under His feet and His enemies be made His footstool. Even if the former of these expressions could mean gradual reconciliation, it is surely impossible so to understand the latter. No stronger language could be used to express forcible subjugation; and the whole Psalm, which speaks of striking through kings, filling places with dead bodies, and wounding the heads over many countries, shows that such is the proper interpretation. The thing described in the Hebrews is, therefore, real earthly dominion, brought in by power and judgment; that is, the very same thing constantly foretold by the Old Testament prophets.

Numerous other passages in the New Testament allude to Christ's appearing to take His dominion, adding, however, two features, about which the old prophets are silent. These passages, already quoted, declare that "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye"—believers—"also appear with Him in glory" (Col. iii. 4); that it is this "manifestation of the sons of God"—Christ and His fellow-

heirs—for which “the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth,” and by which it is to be “delivered from the bondage of corruption” (Rom. viii. 19–22); that when this manifestation takes place, “the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God” (2 Thess. i. 7, 8); that in this appearance He will be followed by the armies of heaven, believers previously caught up to be with Him; and that with them, He will execute judgment on the beast and false prophet, after which Satan will be bound, and the reign of Christ and His saints established for a thousand years (Rev. xix. xx). All these, and other passages before referred to, show that Christ returns to liberate creation from its bondage, to deliver Israel from her ruin, and to reign over the earth in righteousness; adding, however, to the Old Testament teaching, the two weighty facts, that in this reign the heavenly saints will be His fellow-heirs, and that at its commencement, the earliest promise will receive at least a partial fulfilment in the binding and imprisonment of Satan.

And here I may notice a phrase, frequently found in the Old, and occasionally in the New, Testament—“the day of the Lord.” In the Old Testament the coming of the day of Jehovah or the Lord, though once or twice used of some special national judgment, is generally employed to describe that fearful time when “the loftiness of man shall be bowed down” (Isa. ii. 12–22); when “the sun shall be turned into

darkness and the moon into blood" (Joel ii. 31); when Jehovah "will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle," and will "go forth and fight against those nations" (Zech. xiv. 1-3). Now these and other passages in the Old Testament sufficiently identify the coming of the day of the Lord with the period described in the gospel, when "there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon earth distress of nations, with perplexity;" when they shall "see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory," and when Israel is bidden to lift up her head, for her "redemption draweth nigh" (Luke xxi. 25-28).

The coming of the day of the Lord is, therefore, identical in point of time with the coming of the Son of man. The latter is always described as taking the world by surprise. "As in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt. xxiv. 38, 39). In like manner the day of the Lord is declared both by Paul and Peter to come "as a thief in the night" (1 Thess. v. 2; 2 Pet. iii. 10). This coming of the day of the Lord, therefore, ushers in the fearful judgments and the national deliverance wrought by Christ when He comes in power and great glory to reign on the earth.

But though this is the character of the *coming* of



the day of the Lord, the day itself goes much beyond this. In Isaiah ii., we see the fearful judgments with which the day commences, but we read also that "the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." Now this indefinite phrase, "that day," here manifestly meaning the day of the Lord, or Jehovah, is constantly repeated, without anything in the context to explain it, throughout the prophetic writings. "*In that day* shall this song be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks" (Isa. xxvi. 1.) "*In that day* shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall increase their joy in Jehovah, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. xxix. 18, 19). "*In that day* I will cause the horn of the house of Israel to bud forth, and I will give thee the opening of the mouth in the midst of them; and they shall know that I am Jehovah" (Ezek. xxix. 21). "*In that day* will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground; and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely" (Hos. ii. 18). "That day," then, is obviously a well understood phrase, which, when used without special connection, implies the period of Messiah's reign and Israel's blessing. It is the day that commences with the coming of the day of the Lord, in other words it is the day of the

Lord, looked at, not in the light of the judgments by which it is inaugurated, but of the blessings which it introduces.

This expression, then, "the day of the Lord," instead of signifying a single event, like the Lord's coming, is the period extending from the appearance of Christ to execute judgment on the earth all through His glorious reign. It is contrasted with the day of man. Hitherto man has acted in defiance of God without any direct check. In the day of the Lord, this will not be. Sin will be repressed, and the consequences of sin in a great measure restrained; man's lawlessness will be curbed, his haughtiness "bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." With this understanding of the phrase, the New Testament perfectly agrees, for while Peter says that "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night," he adds "in [or during] the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up" (2 Pet. iii. 10). This day commences, then, with the Lord's standing up for the deliverance of Jerusalem, and lasts at least till the end of the world. It probably includes also the final judgment of the unsaved dead and the casting of death, "the last enemy," and Hades into the lake of fire.

Thus this phrase, read in the light of Scripture, fully bears out what we have found to be the unvarying testimony of the Old and the New Testament. It

describes the time when Jehovah's rights are fully vindicated, when Jehovah's Anointed reigns in blessing on the earth—the time when the power of God in dealing with evil is manifested, and His grace and faithfulness in the fulfilment of all His promises concerning the world are displayed—the time when the woman's Seed crushes the serpent's head, when Israel is exalted above the nations, when the true Seed of Abraham dispenses blessing to all the families of the earth, and the true Seed of David is seated in righteousness on His throne in Zion. .

## CHAPTER VIII.

### “THE TIMES AND THE SEASONS.”

“It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power” (Acts i. 7). Such was the Lord’s reply when asked whether He would then restore the kingdom to Israel. No measure is given, therefore, for calculating the time from Christ’s death to Israel’s restoration.

Yet Daniel is prophetically told—“Seventy weeks are determined upon *thy* people and upon *thy* holy city (the Jews and Jerusalem), to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy” (Dan. ix. 24). That is, after seventy weeks, or periods of seven years, Jerusalem, having “received of Jehovah’s hand double for all her sins,” was to be restored, and to become henceforth “the city of righteousness.” Here, therefore, Scripture *does* fix the period of Israel’s restoration.

The prophecy just quoted will explain this apparent

contradiction. After seventy cycles of seven years Israel's restoration was to take place. It is clear, therefore, that the seventieth week has not yet closed. The prophecy, however, continues—"From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem, unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks and threescore and two weeks; . . . . and after the threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, and shall have nothing" (Dan. ix. 25, 26, *see margin*). Sixty-nine weeks had elapsed, therefore, before Christ's death. But if sixty-nine weeks had closed then, and the seventieth week has not closed yet, what conclusion can we draw? Simply this, that as these weeks relate only to the Jews, the time during which God's dealings with the Jews are suspended, is not counted. Now owing to their rejection of Christ, the Jews are at present set entirely aside, and God is engaged in bringing in "the fulness of the Gentiles." The clock of prophetic time has, therefore, stopped with the cutting off of Messiah, and will not beat out its last week until, the fulness of the Gentiles having come in, God resumes His dealings with Israel. The Church period, our time, lies outside prophetic history. Dates may be fixed before and after; but now "the times and the seasons" are in God's hands, the Church being bidden to look, not for the epoch of earthly blessing, but for the return of the Lord to take up His saints.

It would be beside my purpose to enter into details respecting this week. The great principle is that no

part of it runs during the existence of the Church on earth. This period is a prophetic blank, the "many days" during which the children of Israel abide "without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without a teraphim" (Hos. iii. 4). But while entering into no details, it may be well to glance at God's dealings with the Jews from their rejection to their restoration. After foretelling the cutting off of Messiah, Daniel adds—"And the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm a covenant with *the* many for one week; and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolator" (Dan. ix. 26, 27). Thus Messiah is cut off, and does not receive the kingdom. Then the Roman people destroy the city, and desolation reigns until the end of this great national controversy. This is the only reference made to the interval between the destruction of Jerusalem and the last week.

Our Lord makes a like omission. "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars" (Luke xxi. 24, 25). The whole space between the siege of



Jerusalem and the troubles preceding the coming of the Son of man is passed over in silence.

But to return to Daniel. For the last seven years before Israel's restoration, there is a person who confirms a covenant with "the many," or mass, of the Jewish people, for a week. This person must be "the prince that shall come" named in the previous verse. But that prince is the prince of the people that destroyed Jerusalem; he is, therefore, the head of the Roman empire, which thus appears once more upon the scene in these closing days of the times of the Gentiles. A covenant for seven years is concluded between him and the mass of the Jews, who have then returned to Jerusalem and revived their old sacrifices. In the middle of that time he makes the sacrifice to cease, and an abomination or idol is set up, causing desolation to the end of the epoch, when some predetermined fate overtakes the desolator. This last half week, when wickedness and misery culminate, is three and a half years, or "a time, times, and half a time," or forty and two months, or one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

But besides this monarch in league with the bulk of the Jews, other scriptures tell us of a deadly foe ranged against them during the same period of wretchedness. "Behold the day of Jehovah cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city

shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall Jehovah go forth, and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle. And His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east" (Zech. xiv. 1-4). There are, then, two powers, or great confederacies, the one besieging the city, with partial success, the other, headed by "the prince," in league with the mass of its inhabitants, but both helping to intensify its misery, and to aggravate its judgment. This is the "time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time," at which the Jews "shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Dan. xii. 1). It is the period, too, spoken of by Jeremiah, when "all faces are turned into paleness. Alas ! for that day is great, so that none is like it : it is even the time of Jacob's trouble ; but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith Jehovah of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him ; but they shall serve Jehovah their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them" (Jer. xxx. 6-9). It is the time of "distress of nations with perplexity, men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth," when the faithful are told to "lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke xxi. 26-28).

Daniel (ch. vii.) traces the course of Gentile monarchy, symbolising the four great powers under the figure of four beasts. The first, or Babylonian, "was like a lion, and had eagles' wings." The second, the Persian, was "like to a bear." The third, the Macedonian, was "like a leopard," and had four wings and four heads. The last was "dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly," "and it had ten horns." But it undergoes a great transformation, a little horn rising up, with "eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth speaking great things." This little horn exercises the power of the beast, and provokes its judgment. The beast is the Roman empire, whose latter history is thus sketched. "The ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise ; and another shall rise after them, and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. And he shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws ; and they shall be given into his hand until a time, and times, and the dividing of a time " (ver. 24, 25). But he is cut off, and his kingdom "given to the people of the saints of the Most High."

Let us now look at two other prophecies. "From the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days" (Dan. xii. 11, 12). These days are often taken for years, but without ground. As sixty-nine weeks

passed before Messiah was cut off, only one week has yet to run, and in the midst of that week, the daily sacrifice ceases, so that from that time only three and a half years, or one thousand two hundred and sixty days, remain until "that determined shall be poured upon the desolator." But after this there are other judgments to be executed and foes to be overthrown. The periods named in this prophecy exceed the three and a half years by thirty and seventy-five days respectively, seeming to show that between the judgment of the "prince" and the full establishment of Israel's blessing, an interval of seventy-five days will elapse, some signal event, perhaps the destruction of the besieging host, happening after thirty days.

The other prophecy is in Matthew xxiv. 15-31. "When ye, therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (whoso readeth, let him understand), then let them which be in Judea, flee into the mountains. . . . Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And, except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved, but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. Then, if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there, believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. . . . Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and

the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the land mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Now all these prophecies refer to the same set of events. In three, either the abomination of desolation, or the cessation of the daily sacrifice, with the ensuing tribulation, is expressly mentioned. In the other, the vision of the little horn, the identification is not difficult. He is the sovereign reigning over the last phase of the Roman empire, and "the prince that shall come" is the ruler of the Roman people. Each endures till Messiah's kingdom, and is then cut off. The little horn "thinks to change times and laws;" the prince makes the daily sacrifice to cease, and sets up the abomination of desolation. The prince by this act causes all the faithful to flee from Jerusalem; the little horn "wears out the saints of the Most High." The prince's great power for evil lasts half a week; the little horn carries out his blasphemous purposes for a "time, and times, and the dividing of a time." In nation, character, object, fate, duration of power, and epoch in history, the prince that shall come and the little horn are identical.



We can now form some faint picture of this dark era. At the beginning of the last "week," the prince who governs the final phase of the revived Roman empire, makes a treaty with the mass of the Jews, who have then returned to Jerusalem, rebuilt their temple, and re-instituted their sacrifices. A minority, however, the saints or the elect, refuse to join in this treaty, and are subjected, therefore, to severe persecutions. After three and a half years the prince stops the sacrifice, speaks blasphemies against God, and changes times and laws. False Christs also arise, working great wonders, and deceiving all but the elect. The crowning act of the prince's wickedness is the setting up of some abomination, or idol, which brings down desolating judgment. Then the saints flee, without a moment's delay, from the city. The hour of untold tribulation follows, a time which, if prolonged, must end in the total destruction of the race. But for the elect's sake it is shortened. After a fearful shaking of the nations, the Son of man appears, and the pre-appointed judgment overtakes the prince, "the desolator." Then follow the other judgments on the Gentiles and the apostate Jews, the gathering of the elect Israelites yet scattered over the earth, and the final establishment of the Messianic kingdom, together with those elect, or saints of the Most High, whom the prince had recently persecuted.

A passage in Paul's epistles helps to throw still further light on this subject. We saw that the day of the Lord was occasionally used in the Old Testa-



ment of periods of great distress and judgment, which were sorts of shadows of the tribulation and vengeance attending the real day. The Thessalonians, passing through a period of severe trial, had been persuaded by a forged letter "that the day of the Lord was come" (2 Thess. ii. 2). I give what is admitted to be the true rendering of the passage, though widely differing from the authorised version. The apostle assures them that "that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not that when I was yet with you I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only He who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming; even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish: because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (ver. 3-12).

The person here described bears a great resemblance to the little horn. He is like him in wickedness and blasphemy, he lives at the same epoch, before the coming of the day of the Lord, and is cut off at the same time. He sits in the temple of God, which, as already seen, is at this period rebuilt in Jerusalem, and if not "the prince," must, therefore, be in confederacy with him. But he has powers never attributed to "the prince," especially the power of working miracles. He seems, therefore, rather to be one, the chief, of those false Christs named by Matthew, whose miracles should deceive all but the very elect. This deceiver is accepted by the mass of the Jews, and is joined in that league with the prince, of which we have already traced the history. During Paul's time, though the seeds of this wickedness and blasphemy were already sown, their growth was checked by some person, who would continue to exercise the same restraining power until "taken out of the way." This person can only be the Holy Ghost, acting here on earth for Christ. When the Church is taken to heaven, this restraining action of the Spirit will cease. He will "be taken out of the way, and then shall that wicked [one] be revealed" in the full energy of his Satanic power and craft to draw away not only the mass of the Jews, but apostate Christendom likewise, who, having refused the true Christ, are now given over to "strong delusion that they should believe a lie."

It is in the Revelation, however, that the events

of these gloomy days are most fully detailed, especially with reference to the outbreak of blasphemous rebellion against God on the part of the prince and the Man of Sin. This book, to the study of which a special blessing is attached, is divided into three parts. "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be *after these*" (Rev. i. 19). The things which John had seen, were those recorded in the vision of the first chapter; "the things which are" refer to the Church, and are found in the seven epistles composing the second and third chapters; "the things which shall be after these" (that is, after the end of "the things which are"), are the visions and prophecies of the rest of the book. It may be that these have had a partial fulfilment, but the question is, whether their true and perfect accomplishment is past or future.

The epistles in the second and third chapters, though describing seven Asiatic Churches, are meant for warning and instruction in all ages, and the last four to point to phases of the Church just preceding the Lord's coming. To dead Sardis, the Lord says—"I will come on thee as a thief" (Rev. iii. 3); to faithful Philadelphia—"Behold, I come quickly" (ver. 11.); to lukewarm Laodicea—"I will spue thee out of My mouth" (ver. 16); to the false professors in Thyatira, He threatens "great tribulation;" to the true, who remain steadfast "till I come," He promises that they shall rule with Him (ii. 22, 25-27). These frequent allusions to the effect

of the Lord's coming on the professing Church, show that the Spirit here contemplates, not only the assemblies in Asia, but the state of Christendom to the very end, in fact that "the things which are" embrace the whole range of ecclesiastical history. If so, "the things which shall be *after these*" must be the events which happen after the Church is removed.

But there is further evidence. We shall find that from this time the Church is in heaven, that during the troubles afterwards recorded it is never seen on earth, and that these troubles closely correspond with the woes of the last week before Israel's restoration and the Messiah's reign. Chapters iv. and v. open heaven, and show there four and twenty elders seated on thrones, "clothed in white raiment," and "on their heads crowns of gold" (iv. 4). Now these are not characteristic of angels, but of saints. To the apostles it was said that they should sit on thrones (Matt. xix. 28). The faithful in Sardis are told that "they shall walk with Me in white," and that they "shall be clothed in white raiment" (Rev. iii. 4, 5). Crowns, too, are promised to saints, and a golden crown specially befits those who are to rule with Christ. These elders, moreover, are distinguished from angels by the song which they alone sing, in which redemption is the loudest note. They represent, then, the redeemed in heavenly glory. Nor are they merely souls in paradise with Jesus. The souls of saints afterwards slain for the Word of God are presently seen, but their state is wholly different from these

crowned and enthroned elders. The Church, therefore, would seem to be in heaven before the earthly judgments detailed in the following chapters.

These judgments are successively executed as a certain scroll is unsealed. The scroll is taken from God by Christ. But it is noticeable that while Christ appears in the presence of the elders as the Lamb that has been slain, when He takes the scroll it is as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David" (Rev. v. 5). To the redeemed He appears as the Redeemer; when administering earthly judgments, He is seen solely in His Jewish character. The present is the time of Christ's patience; the time here referred to is the day of His vengeance, when He has risen from the Father's throne, and when "the great day of His wrath is come." The first six seals reveal six woes strikingly resembling the picture drawn by the Lord in Matthew's Gospel of "the beginning of sorrows," which shall precede His coming and the end of the age. "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places" (Matt. xxiv. 7, 8).

And now comes a pause, till the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads. Who are these servants of God? Surely, if the Church is on earth, it will be named now. But not a word about it; on the contrary, these servants are exclusively of the twelve tribes of Israel. Then, together with them, appear a multitude of all nations; but still Israel is the central



figure, as in the millennial glory. Those who reach this glory are described as having come "out of THE great tribulation" (vii. 14). Now "*the* great tribulation" is that terrible time of trouble described by Daniel, and named by Christ as immediately preceding Israel's deliverance—that time which is shortened "for the elect's sake," lest all flesh should be destroyed. They are brought out into a state of wondrous blessing, when God "shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." But when the "Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth" (Isa. xxv. 8). The event described, therefore, is the bringing of Israel through her hour of unparalleled affliction into the glory and blessing of the Messianic kingdom.

The Spirit, having thus given us a bright glimpse of the blessing awaiting those who pass through this time of trial, returns to the yet unfulfilled judgments awaiting the earth. Into these we need not enter, but in chapter xi. another scene opens out. There Jerusalem is beheld with its temple restored, and owned once more by God as "the holy city." But though thus named, it remains for a time in the hands of the Gentiles. And what is this time? "Forty and two months." "Two witnesses" also arise, and "prophecy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth" (ver. 1-3). Surely this is not a merely accidental coincidence with Daniel's half-week, when "the prince that shall come" is in league with the apostate Jews, and changes



times and laws. The duration and character of the epochs are identical, both are after Jerusalem and its temple are rebuilt, and both are in that last week when God resumes His dealings with Israel before her restoration. The character of the two witnesses, also, resembles that of Moses and Elijah, but is totally opposed to that of Christian preachers.

In chapter xii. is seen "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars." She brings forth "a man child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron." "A great red dragon" seeks to devour this child, who is, however, caught up to heaven. After this, the dragon, Satan, who had access to heaven as the accuser, is cast out, and comes to the earth full of rage because his time is short. His special object of hatred is the woman who flees from him, and is hidden under God's care, "a thousand two hundred and threescore days," or in the later and more detailed account, "a time and times, and half a time." Now it is clear that the man child who shall rule all nations with a rod of iron is Christ. The woman is obviously not His natural mother, but the nation out of which after the flesh He came. But "they are not all Israel who are of Israel," and this woman typifies, not the apostate nation as a whole, but the inner circle, the real elect Israel of God. At first, Satan sought to destroy her seed, the special object of his malignity. But though at the cross the serpent bruised His heel, though He went into death, it was

not possible that He should be holden of it, and He was taken up to heaven and declared both Lord and Christ. And now the whole Church interval is passed over. Israel is, as it were, out of God's thoughts during that period. Her next appearance is in the thousand two hundred and threescore days, when Satan, knowing his time to be short, uses all his power to destroy her, while God specially intervenes to protect her. It will be remembered that when the abomination of desolation is set up in the middle of the week, the faithful flee at once from the city. How exactly this corresponds in time and circumstances with the flight of the woman in this chapter.

But the agreement does not end here. Chapter xiii. shows the earthly instruments used by Satan in this persecution. The first of these is "a beast," which "rises up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion; and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads, as it were, wounded to death, and his deadly wound was healed; and all the world wondered after the beast. . . . And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things, and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue *forty and two months*. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, and His tabernacle, and them that

dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them " (ver. 1-7).

This "beast," therefore, combines the characteristics of all the beasts of Daniel, but especially resembles the last, transformed, however, into a striking likeness of the great red dragon: that is, it embodies the principal features of Gentile power, but on the whole is of the Roman type, only so changed as to exhibit the most prominent lineaments of Satanic authority. It differs from the fourth beast of Daniel in detail, certain features appearing in Daniel which are wanting in the Revelation, and certain features appearing in the Revelation which are wanting in Daniel. But that it is the same power, though changed to display its Satanic character, is beyond question. It is presented again in chapter xvii. as a "scarlet-coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns," and carrying a woman who is "drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." This woman is explained to be "that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth" (ver. 18). The seven heads have a double signification—meaning, first, "seven mountains on which the woman sitteth," and, secondly, seven kings, or forms of government, five of which were past, while the beast, as a whole, combines the character of the seven and forms the eighth (ver. 9-11). The city, then, is Rome, the seven-hilled city reigning over the kings of the earth.

The beast is the Roman power revived, a power which "was, and is not, and shall be present," for this is the true reading of verse 8.

Turning to the description in chapter xiii., we see how exactly it resembles in moral character the last form of Roman power described in Daniel. In both cases there are ten horns, which are explained to be ten kings, though in Revelation their combination under the headship of the beast is more fully noted. Both blaspheme God; both persecute the saints of the Most High. The one endures for a "time, and times, and the dividing of a time," the other for "forty and two months," that is, each of them lasts for three and a half years, or the oft-named half week of Jewish tribulation and Gentile lawlessness. We now see by what instrument it is that Satan, who gives his power to the beast, persecutes the woman, driving her into the wilderness for a "time, and times, and half a time."

But Satan has another instrument, "another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them that dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed; and he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth, by the means of those miracles which he had power to do" (xiii. 11-14). Can any one fail to

recognise here the chief of the "false Christs," who should appear in the last fearful tribulation, and by their miracles and wonders deceive all but the very elect? Or can any one fail to see the close resemblance between this false prophet, as he is afterwards called, and "the man of sin," whose coming "is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders?" We are not told in the Revelation that this false Christ is at Jerusalem, but it is where the false Christ might be expected, and the man of sin does seat himself in the temple of God. Moreover that the Roman beast at this time exercises authority in Jerusalem appears from the history of the two witnesses whom he puts to death in the city where "our Lord was crucified" (xi. 7, 8).

The false prophet makes an image of the first beast, which all are compelled to worship on pain of death. Where this image is set up does not appear, but as the man of sin sits in the temple of God, as he is a false Messiah, and therefore in connection with the Jews, as the presence of Christ in His temple at Jerusalem was what the Jews expected, and as the beginning of the beast's blasphemous and diabolical power is contemporaneous with the setting up of the abomination of desolation in the holy place, it seems more than probable that this miraculously speaking image is the abomination, or idol, foretold by the prophet, at the erection of which all the saints were to make their escape from the city.

The judgment of Babylon, the corrupt ecclesiastical



system still left after all true believers have been taken to heaven, is outside our present subject. In chapter xvi. we see the confederate kings gathered to the great battle against Christ. "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against Jehovah, and against His Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." Then it is that the Lord arises and gives the nations to Christ for His inheritance, to break them with a rod of iron. Christ with the armies of heaven, the Church, issues forth on a white horse, the symbol of victorious power. "The beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone" (Rev. xix. 19, 20.) Such is the fearful doom of this "son of perdition," this wicked one "whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming" (2 Thess. ii. 8). Such, too, is the fate "determined" which is "poured upon the desolator."

The Revelation does not enter into the judgment inflicted upon other enemies. These are shown variously in Zechariah, Daniel, Isaiah, Joel, and the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew. The object of this



book is to add to what the prophets had already told concerning this last, and truly diabolical, phase of human lawlessness, and to bring to its issue the long rebellion of Satan against God. The destruction of the beast and the false prophet completes one part, the binding of Satan another. The Revelation also differs from the other prophecies in giving the heavenly side of Christ's rule. The Old Testament represents the Messiah as ruling with His saints ; but these are the earthly saints. The Revelation adds the rule of the heavenly saints. Besides the saints raised or caught up at Christ's coming for believers, those who "were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God," and those "which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image," are raised in this last act of the first resurrection, and live and reign with Christ a thousand years.

## CHAPTER IX.

### BRIEF SUMMARY OF GOD'S WAYS.

WE have now seen that the Old Testament prophecies, though sometimes receiving a striking application, have not their proper or perfect fulfilment, in the Church, but after the Church is taken; that the Church interval, is, as it has been aptly styled, "a parenthesis" in God's dealings with the earth; and that when it is ended, and believers, whether living or dead, have been caught up to meet the Lord in the air, the Divine purposes respecting the earth will be resumed, the Jews, who are now "enemies" as concerning the gospel, will be taken up again, according to election, as "beloved for the fathers' sakes," and the gifts and calling of God will be proved to be without repentance. Then God's promises of blessing to the world will have their accomplishment, not in the first, but in the Second, man; the woman's Seed will crush the serpent's head; the "one" Seed of Abraham will come to bless all the families of the earth; the multitudinous seed, like the sand of the seashore innumerable, will inherit their promised land "for an everlasting possession," and will occupy their appointed

place as the foremost of the nations ; and the Seed of David will be established on the throne of His kingdom for ever.

The investigation of this subject has led us over a wide space, and though I have, as far as possible, avoided detail, it has been necessary, for the understanding of God's ways, to enter into some questions with considerable fulness. It may be helpful, therefore, to pause for a moment, and cast our eye back, gathering up the various truths which the Scriptures have unfolded to our gaze, and endeavouring to condense them into a brief but comprehensive summary.

Man after the flesh failed in every position in which God placed him. He fell under the power of Satan, and no seed of the woman arose to crush the one who had brought in the ruin. He filled the earth with corruption and violence, so that God repented He had made him, and destroyed "the world that then was" with a flood. He failed in government, till at last God confounded his plans of self-aggrandisement at Babel. Called out as a separate nation and entrusted with God's law, he failed again as signally as before, breaking the commandments ere ever, in their written form, they had entered the camp. Tried as a nation which should execute God's judgments, and tried again under sovereigns who should be the dispensers of God's righteousness, the same dreary story of failure, rebellion, and ruin was once more repeated. The nation proved as bad as the heathen by whom they were surrounded, and the descendants of David were

the corrupters, instead of the righteous governors of the people.

The first man, therefore, had now been proved to the utmost, as to his power to carry out God's governmental purposes. Even in the promised line, the seed of Abraham and David had failed as disastrously as all others. It had been demonstrated that man in the flesh, whether in the line of promise or out of it, could not fulfil God's designs or bring in God's promises of blessing to the earth. He was, therefore, set aside, and the scheme of God's earthly government postponed until the Second Man, the One who gathers in His own person all the promises, and who alone is worthy and able to administer God's righteous government on the earth, is brought forth. First the chosen nation was divided; then the larger portion, ten out of the twelve tribes, were carried into captivity, from which they have never returned; and lastly, the two remaining tribes, with the royal line of David, were taken prisoners to Babylon.

As far as earthly government is concerned, the Jews were now given up until the Second Man is brought in. With this long abandonment of the Jews commenced "the times of the Gentiles," that is, the period during which the sceptre of earthly dominion is entrusted to the Gentiles, instead of Israel. These "times of the Gentiles" began with the kingdom of Babylon, the head of gold, in Nebuchadnezzar's prophetic dream. Then came the kingdom of the Medes and Persians symbolised by the breast and arms of

silver ; the Greek monarchy set forth in the belly and thighs of brass ; and afterwards the stronger and more enduring dominion of Rome, represented by the legs of iron. After this, "the times of the Gentiles" changed their nature ; iron and clay mingled together, or, the rule was divided among kingdoms of various origin and character, though all connected with the dismembered Roman empire. Another vision shows us that in this last stage, the Roman dominion will revive in a federal form under the presidency of one specially energised by Satanic power. It is when it has reached this phase that judgment will descend, a stone cut out without hands falling on the Gentile powers and crushing them to pieces, after which it grows into a mountain that fills the whole earth ; or, as interpreted by Daniel, "in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed ; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. ii. 44). Such is the history, prophetically traced, of the yet uncompleted "times of the Gentiles."

While these are running their course, the Jews—that is, the two tribes forming the kingdom of Judah—fulfilled the seventy years of captivity foretold by the prophet Jeremiah. At the close of that period, the Babylonian kingdom having been destroyed, and the Persian established on its ruins, Cyrus issued a decree permitting the Jews of the captivity to return to

Jerusalem, in virtue of which a small band, without political power or position, found their way back to the ruined city, and there rebuilt the temple. Nearly a century afterwards, the same Gentile power gave a "commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem." From this "commandment" dates Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks. It is divided into three parts, of seven weeks, of sixty-two weeks, and of one week. During the first part, of seven weeks, the city was rebuilt. The second part, of sixty-two weeks, comprehends the time from the completion of the city to the cutting off of the Messiah. The third part, of one week, which yet awaits its accomplishment, carries "the times of the Gentiles" to a close, "finishes the transgression" of the Jews, and brings in "everlasting righteousness," the desolator being destroyed, and the Messiah's kingdom established.

The Jews, as we have seen, had been politically discarded till the Messiah should come. In process of time He did come, heralded by John the Baptist, and the kingdom was offered to the nation on condition of repentance. But man in the flesh proved no less incompetent to repent, to receive the Messiah, or to obtain blessing through Him presented as a sovereign, than he had before shown himself to carry out God's purposes in his own strength. God manifest in the flesh only drew out the enmity of his heart in more fearful display. The Jews, instead of receiving Him as their anointed King, crucified Him between two thieves. The effect of this rejection was twofold.



The blood they shed was designed, according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, to be the means by which He could righteously reconcile all things to Himself, by which He could blot out sin, and thus lay the foundation of all true blessing to both Jew and Gentile. But the immediate effect of the crime, so far as the Jews were concerned, was that their house was left to them desolate until they should say—"Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord ;" and that the kingdom, instead of taking the manifested, prophetic shape in which the Jews should be the head of the nations, assumed, until the time of Israel's repentance, a mysterious hidden form connected with Christ in heaven, and in which the Gentiles were the special objects of God's favour.

The first summons, then, after Christ's resurrection, was addressed to the Jews, calling on them to repent, and thus to receive the kingdom in manifested glory. On their refusal, the kingdom definitely assumed the mysterious form, the natural branches being broken out of the olive tree, and the "wild olive tree," or Gentiles, being grafted in. "Blindness in part happened to Israel," which will continue "until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." There was, indeed, "a remnant according to the election of grace" even out of partially blinded Israel, but the nation as a whole was cut off while the Gentiles took for a time the place of pre-eminence in God's thoughts.

The political displacement of the Jews brought in "*the times of the Gentiles.*" The moral or religious

displacement of the Jews makes way for "*the coming in of the Gentiles*." It was only when this took place that Israel really became "Lo-ammi," not My people, though they had long ceased to be the centre of God's government on earth. During the coming in of the Gentiles, God's purposes of earthly blessings are suspended. The stream of prophetic time ceases to run. It stagnated, so to speak, after the sixty-ninth week, when Messiah was cut off, and will not again begin to flow till after the fulness of the Gentiles has come in, and God once more takes up the thread of His purposes concerning the earth.

Meanwhile the Gentiles brought into the vacant place of privilege and responsibility to God, under Christianity, have failed as signally as the Jews did under the law. The greater part have never accepted Christ even in name ; Christendom, the portion of the world which has nominally owned Jesus as Lord, has become a leavened mass, corrupt to its very core. The small handful of true believers in its midst have themselves ceased to present any corporate testimony, are rent into a hundred conflicting sects, have given up the "blessed hope" of the Lord's return for His saints, and as a consequence are often hardly distinguishable from the world around them in their objects, their pursuits, and the character of their walk. But though the Lord "is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish," He "is not slack concerning His promise," and in a little while "the trumpet shall sound, and the dead (believers) shall be raised incorruptible, and

we (the living believers) shall all be changed." This is the un-dated, ever-present hope for the Church. When this "coming of the Lord" for His saints has happened, Christendom, the remaining branches grafted into the olive tree, having failed to continue in the goodness of God, will be cut off. The fulness of the Gentiles having come in, the corrupt mass of false professors left behind will be dealt with by God in righteous judgment. Judicial blindness will overtake them, "because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; and for this cause, God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. ii. 10-12).

When the Church has been taken, and the Gentiles, the olive branches grafted in contrary to nature, have been cut off, the natural branches will be "grafted in, for God is able to graff them in again." The Church interval being over, time once more begins to run, and the unfulfilled week of Daniel's prophecy is told out to its completion. In this week commence the judgments which precede the "day of the Lord," or the establishment of Messiah's kingdom. These judgments may be broadly divided into four different classes.

FIRST, The Jews and the rest of the Israelites will be restored, but only after fearful troubles, from which but a portion will escape. The Jews, who rejected the Christ, will receive the Anti-

christ, will enter into league with "the prince that shall come," the last phase of Gentile power, and will worship his image, "the abomination of desolation" set up in the holy place. The remnant of faithful ones who refuse to have part in these last scenes of wickedness and lawlessness, will be persecuted with fearful persistency and malignity, many of them killed, the rest driven into exile. The time will be one of untold tribulation, so that, but for its shortness, no flesh could be saved. Then the Lord Himself will appear in power and great glory, destroying with the sword out of His mouth the followers of the Antichrist, easing Him of His adversaries and avenging Him of His enemies. The effect on the nation will be "like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap." Those who "abide the day of His coming," the purged remnant who "come out of the great tribulation," having "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," shall be a holy people, their dross purged away, their judges restored as at the first, and their counsellors as at the beginning, and Jerusalem shall be "called the city of righteousness, the faithful city." Thus shall Zion "be redeemed with judgments and her converts with righteousness," while "the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake Jehovah shall be consumed." The elect remnant of Israel also will be brought back, and made to inhabit the land.

SECOND, But besides the purging judgments referred to, there will be other acts of righteous government and retribution reserved for that dreadful period. Babylon, especially, the corrupt carcass of Christendom, will come into remembrance. The blood shed and the crimes committed in the name of Christ will then be righteously avenged. The beast and his confederates, themselves following a still more fearful delusion, will hate the whore and make her desolate; the very power which has supported her will turn against her; and the cup which she hath filled shall be filled to her double.

THIRD, The fall of Babylon shows the doom of that soulless profession of Christ, and that lifeless ecclesiastical organisation which will survive when all true believers have been removed to the Father's house. But by whom is this apostate, corrupt system destroyed? By the beast and his coadjutors, that is, by that wicked head of the Gentile powers whose pride and blasphemy will at length draw down the lightnings of God's avenging wrath—the impious chief of those kings of the earth who shall “take counsel together against Jehovah, and against His Anointed.” This associated Gentile dominion is the third class dealt with in the judgments of the last week. The confederacy, headed by the prince and energised by Satan, will form a league with the mass of the Jews and their false Christ, and will gather together their forces to battle; when Christ will



appear in His glory, followed by the armies of heaven, take the beast and the false prophet and cast them alive into the lake of fire, and afterwards destroy their followers with the sword that proceedeth out of His mouth. So end "the times of the Gentiles," that period during which the sceptre of government was entrusted to their hands because of the failure of Israel.

FOURTH, But there is another class of judgments. The Gentiles who successively held the right of government as a trust from God do not include the whole body of the peoples of the earth. This sceptre passed from the Babylonian to the Persian, from the Persian to the Greek, from the Greek to the Roman, and at length to the wicked king whose doom we have just seen. But the confederacy between the Jews and the Roman dominion will be directed against a power which at that time threatens Jerusalem with destruction. This power, which God uses, like the Assyrian of old, as a scourge to the unfaithful Jews, will, when the hour for judgment comes, itself also be visited. When half the city has been carried off, Christ will appear for its deliverance, the besieging host will be cut off, and the remnant of the people saved.

This will close the preliminary judgments. The nation having been purged, Babylon consumed, the last Satanic form of Gentile dominion overthrown,



and the enemies who sought to destroy Jerusalem scattered, Christ's kingdom will be established on earth. The saints, who have come purged out of the great tribulation, will receive dominion under Him. The rest of the Gentiles will be divided into two classes, and rewarded or punished according to their treatment of "these My brethren," the feeble remnant of saints harassed and wasted by the persecution of the beast and false prophet. But the great feature will be the fulfilment of all God's earthly counsels in the person of the Second Man, the Lord from heaven, who alone is worthy to receive the dominion, and who alone can exercise it for God's glory, or for man's blessing. Satan will be cast into the bottomless pit, while the Bride, the Lamb's wife, seen in figure as the New Jerusalem, will reign with Christ a thousand years.

It is a solemn thing to trace the incurable hatred of the human heart to God. A thousand years' experience of Christ's righteous and blessed rule will not suffice to change the nature of man. No sooner is Satan loosed from his imprisonment than the nations rebel, but only to be at once destroyed with devouring fire from heaven. This last outbreak of human wickedness brings the world's history to a close. The earth is burnt up, the elements melt with fervent heat, and no place is found for them. Then the dead, who had no part in the first resurrection, are raised, are judged according to their works, and are cast into the lake of fire. Satan, death, and Hades are all similarly destroyed. And now, the last enemy having

been vanquished, the work of reconciliation, founded on the blood of the cross, is completed ; a new heaven and a new earth are created, in which righteousness not only reigns, as during the thousand years, but permanently dwells ; Christ, having ruled "till He hath put all enemies under His feet," delivers up the kingdom to God, even the Father ; and God, being now all in all, and no longer estranged by human guilt, makes His tabernacle with man.

Such, as traced out in the Word of the living God, is the prospect before the world. Are these the things which Christians are looking for ? Amidst all the talk of modern progress, all the straining after improvement and education, all the boast of the bright future in store for the world, have they grasped the truth that God's judgment is looming over the whole scene ? In the intoxication of this world-banquet do they heed the fingers of the hand tracing on the wall the fateful words, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN"—or are they blind to the warning which God has given ? Nay, are they not even fostering the false hopes of the world against which they should be protesting, and eagerly floating along the stream of modern progress, ignorant that it is sweeping them down its fatal rapids to the crash and roar of impending judgment ? Soon—we know not how soon—the trumpet will sound, the shout will be heard, and all true believers will be "for ever with the Lord." What will then become of modern progress ? What will then be the fruit of all the organisations and associations for making some-

thing out of that nature which Scripture declares to be enmity against God, something out of that world which has rejected and crucified its rightful Lord? The boasted ecclesiastical organisation, bereft of believers, will be nothing save a putrid corpse, hateful to the nations, which will burn it to ashes. The noisy party of progress, turning from this ghastly mimicry of Christianity to the latest novelty of the day, will be given up to "strong delusion that they should believe a lie." Have we God's thoughts about what is passing? Are we "minding earthly things," as those "whose end is destruction," despising the warnings of Scripture, and seeking to improve what God pronounces beyond remedy? Or have we given up the first man, and sided with Him whom the world has rejected, waiting with Him for the hour when the world's real improvement shall be brought about by Himself as the Second Man, the Lord from heaven, the only One who can carry out God's purposes of blessing, or establish God's rule of righteousness, on the earth?



*PART THIRD.*

THE CHURCH OF GOD.





## CHAPTER I.

### THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH.

WE have now briefly traced God's dispensational ways. Up to the cross He was unfolding His plan of earthly government, trying man, first alone, then with Christ in his midst, to see whether he could carry out the Divine purposes of blessing to the world. The result was disastrous failure. Man could neither execute God's schemes himself, nor receive—or even recognise—the Anointed One by whom they are to be accomplished. The first man ruined all he touched; the Second Man was despised, rejected, and crucified. This brought God's plans to a close until the people who refused their Messiah shall repent, and He shall again appear for their deliverance and blessing. Meanwhile, even the count of prophetic time stops, the space between Christ's death and the resumption of God's earthly designs being treated as a blank.

How, then, is God filling up this interval? What purposes is He now carrying out? Till the cross the first man was under trial. But there all was changed. Man proved that, in his nature, he was hopelessly alienated from God, and could not even receive blessing

from Him in whom all God's gracious promises and purposes await their fulfilment. It was not enough, then, for the Second Man to appear. The first man must be created anew ere he could take the blessings which the Second Man came to dispense.

And how could God effect this transformation? How could man be drawn out of this pit of ruin? By the very thing which showed how hopeless his ruin was! The deed which proved man's ripeness for perdition brought out God's power unto salvation. The cross which demonstrated the irreconcilable hatred of man's heart to God, revealed the unquenchable love of God's heart to man. That which sealed the doom of the old creation opened the door for the new. The blood shed upon the cross laid the righteous basis for the reconciliation of all things. In Christ's death the old creation was judicially set aside, while His resurrection brought in the Second Man as the "last Adam," the first-born of a new creation, in each member of which God could find the same delight as in its risen Head. Instead of the single grain of wheat, He had fallen into the ground and died, so that now He could produce much fruit, as it is written—"Behold I and the children which God hath given me."

All blessing, then, for the Church or the world, is based on the death and resurrection of the Second Man. But the cross is regarded in Scripture from the side of man's guilt as well as from that of God's grace. All admit the punishment of the Jews for their rejection of Christ. But were the Gentiles with-

out guilt? The Holy Ghost teaches that Christ came as the Light; that "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not." Jesus declares the world's condemnation to be "that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." The world, therefore, that is, man as a whole, is guilty of refusing the One sent from God to effect its blessing, and this crime still forms the subject of God's judgment, both on Jew and Gentile. By this judgment, the Jews have been cast out, and the earthly blessings of the kingdom, whether to Jew or Gentile, postponed. Creation is still left groaning for deliverance, until the sceptre is given to Christ. And, in the meanwhile, God is carrying out other purposes, quite apart from His designs of righteous government and blessing for the earth.

These purposes may be looked at, first as regards the kingdom, and next as regards the Church. The kingdom in its Jewish form is postponed. In outward display, it cannot be set up till Israel shall say—"Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." But Jesus speaks of "the mysteries of the kingdom," and it is in this mysterious or unrevealed form, that the kingdom now exists. During this epoch, Christ, not having received His own throne, is seated on the Father's throne, waiting till God shall give Him the nations for His inheritance. It is the day of His "patience," not of His "power." He is not taking vengeance on His enemies, but beseeching them to be

reconciled. Satan is allowed to sow in the field without provoking immediate judgment; the leaven to work in the meal till all is corrupted. God still tarries in grace, not willing that any should perish, and seeking to gather out a people from the ruin and judgment which are impending. Such is the kingdom in its mysterious form. On God's side it is the display of perfect grace and matchless forbearance; on man's, it is but a sadder disclosure of his proneness to depart from God, and to corrupt the best gifts entrusted to his hands.

But while the kingdom drifts to hopeless shipwreck under man's pilotage, God has another thought in His heart, a mystery which, as Paul says, "in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." This mystery was disclosed "to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known, *by the CHURCH*, the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus, our Lord" (Eph. iii. 5, 10, 11). Here, then, is God's present work. His schemes of earthly blessing are suspended; the kingdom, in its mysterious form, is filled with corruption and hurrying to judgment; but He is carrying out purposes for Christ's glory which He formed before the world was—purposes which prophets had not heard, and angels desire to look into—purposes in which, whatever our dulness, the principalities and powers in heavenly places discern the

manifold wisdom of God. And these purposes are fulfilled "by the Church," which thus stands forth not only as the object of God's most cherished delight, but as the brightest display of His Divine wisdom.

The void, then, between the suspension and resumption of God's earthly purposes is filled up by the kingdom in its present form, and by the Church. According to God's institution, these were co-extensive, consisting of the same persons, though viewed in a different way. Notwithstanding the divergence, therefore, which man's failure has introduced, the kingdom is still occasionally spoken of in Scripture under its narrower, as well as under its wider aspect—according to its institution by God as well as according to its administration by man. Both views appear in the discourse in which our Lord specially treats of the kingdom in its present form. (Matt. xiii.) When speaking to the multitude, He shows the kingdom as man makes it, tares growing among the wheat, leaven corrupting the pure meal. But afterwards He retires with His disciples into the house, and unfolds the mysteries which it was given to them only to know. In explaining the parable of the tares, He says—"The good seed are the children of the kingdom, but the tares are the children of the wicked one." Here, then, the kingdom is looked at in its narrower aspect, as consisting only of the good seed. The two parables which follow regard it in the same light. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof,



goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it " (Matt. xiii. 44-46).

We need not notice the usual interpretation, according to which these parables are regarded as describing man's search after salvation. Such an explanation, which clashes with the argument of the chapter no less than with the general teaching of Scripture, could only have originated in complete blindness to the unity of design which threads together the various parables. The purpose of the discourse is to show, first, the means by which the kingdom, in its present form, is spread—by the sowing of the word: next its history, viewed as an outward profession—worldly admixture and corruption; lastly, the kernel of reality which God sees through the gigantic shell of pretension in which it is hidden from the sight of man. Outside, Jesus had told the people what the kingdom would become in man's hands. Inside, He unfolds to His disciples what would remain, if viewed according to God's thoughts. Man would make it a leavened mass. But in its midst was a treasure on which the heart of Christ was set, and for which He would "sell all that He had," lay down His very life. The land was bought, not for its own worth, but for the treasure it concealed. This is the kingdom according to God's institution, seen by His eye alone, amidst the field of barren profession in which it is hidden.



And as the kingdom is spoken of in its wider and narrower aspect, so is the Church. The Church, as drawn according to God's thoughts in the Epistle to the Ephesians, and the Church as seen in the second and third chapters of the Revelation, are sadly contrasted pictures. In the first case, the real Church, consisting only of true believers, and viewed in living connection with Christ, is the subject which the Spirit of God presents for our contemplation. In the second case, the Church which bears the name of Christ, and is responsible to God as connected with that name, is the theme on which the solemn verdict is pronounced. In the first there can be no failure, for it is all of God. In the second there is the same grievous departure from the thoughts of God as in everything else entrusted to man's responsibility.

Our inquiry at present is confined to the Church according to God's thoughts. Only two references to it are made in our Lord's own teaching. But though the Church is one of those subjects which were but partially revealed during Christ's lifetime, these references will help us to understand much that God afterwards made known "unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." The first occasion on which the "assembly" or "Church" is expressly named, is that recorded in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew's Gospel. In the thirteenth, the kingdom had been spoken of in its mysterious form, first as to its historical development in the hands of man, and

next as to that hidden circle which made it dear to Christ. The sixteenth takes up the kingdom again in its administrative form, and names in connection with it, the new "assembly" which Christ was about to build. Jesus asks His disciples, "Whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter (*petros*, a stone); and upon this rock (*petra*, a rock) I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then charged He His disciples that they should tell no man that He was Jesus the Christ. From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord; this shall not be unto Thee. But He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan; thou art an offence unto Me, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. Then said Jesus unto His

disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt. xvi. 15-24).

This passage shows a great dispensational change, the presentation of Jesus in a new character, and His abandonment, as to present testimony, of that which He had hitherto borne. After John was cast into prison, Jesus had begun "to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. iv. 17). This public proclamation of the kingdom to the Jews was now to cease. Henceforth, instead of offering Himself to the nation as their Messiah or Christ, He charged "His disciples that they should tell no man that He was Jesus the Christ." Instead of pointing to national acceptance and an earthly crown, He speaks of national rejection and an earthly cross. Instead of the old hope of the prophetic kingdom, He mentions a new thing which He was about to establish, the assembly or Church. And instead of the abandoned name of Messiah, which connected Him with the throne of David, He assumes, in reference to the Church, the newly proclaimed, and infinitely higher, title of the "Son of the living God."

The kingdom, then, in its prophetic and national shape, was no longer the object of testimony to the people, or the immediate purpose in the thoughts of God. Though not, of course, abandoned, it was postponed, and in the meanwhile, it was to be set up in quite a different form. In this form it was placed under man's administration, the keys being given to

Peter, who also received authority to bind and loose. These were not the keys of the Church, much less of heaven, but "the keys of the kingdom of heaven." A key is that which gives admission. On Peter, then, was laid the trust of admitting, not into the Church, but into the kingdom. How he used it we see in the Acts. He it was who authoritatively proclaimed Jesus as "both Lord and Christ," calling on the Jews to own His rights and to be baptized in His name. Thus the Jewish door was opened, and through it, in one day, three thousand souls entered the kingdom. But the Church was never entrusted to man's hands, and the account adds that "the LORD added to the *Church* daily such as should be saved" (Acts ii. 47). Afterwards another door to the kingdom was opened. Cornelius's prayers were heard. One might have supposed that the apostle of the Gentiles would be used to bring him in. But no; Christ had given the keys to Peter, and the locked door of the Gentiles could only be lawfully opened by him. Taught of God that in the new form of the kingdom, the earthly distinctions of clean and unclean were abolished, he went at the first summons, and seeing "that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost, he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (Acts x. 44-48.)

The power of adding to the Church, then, belongs to "the Lord" alone. The power of the keys, of admitting to the kingdom, was given to Peter. And with this Peter's history almost ceases. He had

opened to the Gentiles; another brought them in. After Cornelius had entered, Peter no longer occupies the front rank, and Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, becomes the leading figure in the history of God's future workings. The power of binding and loosing, though in the above quotation given to Peter, was afterwards extended to a much larger company.

But let us look at what is here taught about the Church. Jesus says—"Upon this rock I *will* build My Church." This shows that the Church had not yet been founded. There had been, of course, as there were then, saved persons, but since the Church did not yet exist, it is clear that these saints formed no part of it. So in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "the Church of the first-born" and the "just men made perfect" are named as two quite different companies (Heb. xii. 23). Evidently, then, the Church which Jesus was about to build was not the whole of the redeemed, but a particular class, distinguished by certain definite characteristics from the rest—from the Old Testament saints, whose spirits are now in heaven, and also, as we shall see, from the saints who will enjoy the blessings of Christ's earthly rule.

This will plainly appear from the fact that the Church's foundation was a new one, and, therefore, could not be that on which the Old Testament saints had been set. Simeon, who represents this class, had waited for "the Lord's Christ," and having seen Him could say, "Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation" (Luke ii. 30). And so when the kingdom is esta-



blished in its outward glory, the title of "the Christ" will again be the foundation of blessing—the Anointed of God will be the salvation of His people and the light of the Gentiles. But this title is now dropped, Jesus appears clothed in a new dignity, and another foundation is laid for the building of the Church.

What is this foundation? The Church of Rome has interpreted the text to mean Peter himself, and so far as the construction of the passage is concerned, the choice is between Peter, and Jesus in the newly revealed character of "Son of the living God." Now Jesus does not say that the Church will be built on Peter (*petros*, a stone), but on this *petra* (or rock)—"thou art *Petros*, and upon this *petra* I will build my Church." The change in the word—both unnecessary and incorrect if *Petros*, or Peter, had been the foundation—shows that not he, but the thing he had mentioned, was the real *petra*, or rock on which the Church was to be built. This play on the name *Petros*—a name which had been given long before—is a common thing in Scripture, where names are often applied with reference to some important event. Thus, when the ark was taken, the dying Israelite mother named her child "I-chabod" (where is the glory?). So Jacob, blessing his sons, says, "Judah (praise) thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise." Esau, too, in his bitterness, exclaims concerning his brother—"Is not he rightly named Jacob (supplanter)? For he hath supplanted me these two times." So here, Peter having laid bare the rock on



which the Lord was going to build, Jesus says to him, in substance—"Thou art well named 'stone,' for thou hast showed the living stone, or rock, on which the Church will be founded."

The foundation, then, is not Peter, but Jesus. This the passage itself proves, and Peter elsewhere expressly states, for, speaking of Jesus, he says—"To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed, indeed, of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood" (1 Pet. ii. 4, 5). The foundation, however, is not simply Jesus, but Jesus in the new character here brought to light. He drops the title of Messiah, the foundation of Jewish hopes, and of God's plans of earthly government. But He takes up the title of "Son of the living God," and on this declares that He will build His Church. Throughout Scripture the name by which God reveals Himself describes the character of His present dealings. He is Elohim in creation; God Almighty to the patriarchs; Jehovah to Israel; Father, to those who now believe on His Son. So Christ is Lord (*Adon*) to David; Son of man, as the executor of God's righteous purposes; Messiah to Israel; and "Son of the living God" to the Church.

There is deep significance in the word "living." When Jesus speaks of Himself as "the living bread which came down from heaven," He adds, "If any man shall eat of this bread, he shall live for ever" (John vi. 51). Again He says—"The living Father

hath sent Me, and I live by the Father" (ver. 57). In these cases the word conveys the idea of imparting, as well as possessing, life. It is the description of One who, having life in His own right and power, is beyond the dominion of death, and can communicate life to others. Thus Jesus says that He has life in Himself; that He has "power to lay it down," and "power to take it again;" also that He is "the resurrection and the life," and that those who believe in Him shall not die. The title "living God" is, then, most important here. Jesus was just going to tell the disciples of His death, and that they must take up their cross, and lay down their lives for His sake. What a stay, then, to have to do with "the living God," to be built into a structure which the gates of Hades cannot touch, to be endowed with a life on which the second death hath no power!

And this leads us to another revelation. As soon as Jesus drops the Messianic character, and takes up, as the foundation of the Church, the title of "Son of the living God," He begins to speak of His death and resurrection. It is quite true that this is the ground of blessing to the Jews as well as to the Church. But there is a broad difference. Israel owes its blessing to Christ's death, but is associated, as to its calling, with His earthly glory. The Church, on the contrary, is associated with His earthly rejection. As far as the world is concerned, Israel will know Him as the wearer of the crown; the Church knows Him as the bearer of the cross. Israel will own

Him when "girded with strength;" the Church owns Him "crucified through weakness." And so of His resurrection. His earthly power will doubtless be taken as the risen One. Still this is not the fact mainly insisted upon in connection with the kingdom glory; whereas it is always most prominent in connection with the Church. He is "determined to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from among the dead." He says to John, "I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore." Believers are dead with Christ, and also quickened with Him. They are to yield themselves to God "as those that are alive from the dead." Thus, while all are *interested* in Christ's death and resurrection, the Church is *associated* with them in a marked and peculiar manner.

How it is associated with them is seen in what follows—"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it." How unlike the language of Jehovah to Israel! For the Jews will know Jesus as their Messiah, seated on the throne of earthly power, and wearing the crown of earthly glory. The Christian knows Him as the Son, "crucified through weakness," but living "by the power of God." How can the Jew have anything but blessing on the earth where his Messiah is ruling as supreme? How, on the other hand, can the Christian

look for anything but rejection in the world where his Lord had nothing but a felon's cross ? The Jew's confidence is the sceptre which will uphold his earthly rights. The Christian's is association in life with the One who has triumphed over death, and thus set him on a rock where the gates of Hades are powerless against him.

This passage, then, shows the postponement of the kingdom in its outward form, and its existence, meanwhile, in another shape, under man's administration. During this time Jesus reveals Himself under a new name. On this He builds the new fabric of the assembly or Church, which, being founded on His own Sonship and Godhead, is beyond the power of Hades. This Church is associated with Christ in death and resurrection. Earth is not the sphere of its blessings, but of its trials ; and those who follow Christ must take up their cross. How admirably this character of the Church harmonises with the special hope held out before it of the Lord's return for His saints ! The world, subject to Gentile rule, can only drift to more fearful judgment ; the kingdom, entrusted to man, can only become a leavened mass ; the Church, left amidst the nipping blasts of a godless world, and the stagnant gloom of a lifeless profession, can look up to the mansions prepared in the Father's house, and await the hour when the shout shall be heard, and all the redeemed, changed into the likeness of Christ, shall be caught up to be "for ever with the Lord." When Christ takes His earthly dominion He will asso-

ciate with Himself an earthly people, the sharers of His earthly glory and the objects of His earthly favour. But Christ is now the outcast of earth and the joy of heaven. He has, therefore, associated with Himself a heavenly people, the partners of His earthly rejection, but the objects of His heavenly delight. Down here, they are in the world, but not of it; and He has given Himself at God's right hand as the object of their present affection, their present occupation, and their present hope. Are our souls up to this magnificent position?

Such, then, is our Lord's teaching in this first mention of the new fabric He was about to build. He afterwards further instructs His disciples on the same subject, telling them how to act in case of injury by a fellow-believer. Should all the means which grace can suggest prove ineffectual, they are to "tell it unto the Church." The Lord then adds, "But if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. xviii. 17-20).

Here, then, the power of binding and loosing, before conferred on Peter, is given to all the disciples.



The assembly is to act in cases of discipline, such as that of one of its members injuring another, and refusing to acknowledge his fault. The grace and gentleness of Christ are first to be shown. If these fail, the dishonour done to His name must be thought of, and the assembly must purge itself by putting away the evil-doer. This is the power of binding and loosing, which is given, not to the apostles, but to the Church or assembly. It is the authority to put away and to restore those who have sinned. The same power is again given after Christ's resurrection, where He says to His disciples, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost : whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John xx. 22, 23). This authority, conferred, not upon the apostles, but the disciples—that is, on believers as a whole—is not the power of putting away sins, which belongs to God only, but of exercising a divinely-guided judgment as to what offences demand the excision of the wrong-doer, or what measure of repentance justifies his restoration. The power is given in connection with the Holy Ghost. While guided by Him, their authority could not but be rightly used. But the moment they ceased to be guided by Him, the sole ground of their authority vanished.

So, too, in the Gospel of Matthew the authority to bind and loose, and the title to ask that anything shall be done for them, rests simply on the presence of Jesus in their midst, "FOR, where two or three



are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Now, in the New Testament, the name stands for the person acting in the character which the name indicates. Thus Jesus says, "I have manifested *Thy name* (the Father's) unto the men which Thou gavest Me" (John xvii. 6). Again, "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed *in the name* of the only begotten Son of God" (John iii. 18). So, the Philadelphians are commended because they had "not denied *My name*" (Rev. iii. 8). Being gathered in the name of Jesus, then, is being gathered to His person, owning His authority, and in accordance with His mind. If the meeting, though called by His name, should really be to some other centre, should own some other authority, or should be contrary to His directions, His presence is not promised. Doubtless the Lord's grace may go beyond His promise, and where there is truth of heart, all allowance will be made for ignorance and failure. There may, therefore, be much blessing where there is even wide departure from the Lord's mind, for we have to do with a God who knows our weakness and pities our ignorance. Thus, in the days of Israel's ruin, we read of those who through ignorance "had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written; but Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary;

and the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people" (2 Chron. xxx. 18-20). Grace, then, both can and will come in where failure is the result of ignorance, and where there is a true heart towards God. But we may be sure that the Lord's way is better than man's; nor can the grace which blesses in spite of ignorance, excuse indifference as to what the Lord's mind really is. The Lord's presence will not be granted to sanction the ignorance arising from culpable neglect, any more than to give approval to the wilfulness and disobedience of those who use His name to carry out their own thoughts.

We are then responsible to learn what is meant by meeting in the Lord's name. Only to those thus assembled are given the presence of Jesus, power with God, and the authority to bind and to loose. Nor, if we understand what it is to be gathered in that name, will these magnificent promises and powers fill us with wonder. Let believers be really assembled in obedience to the Lord's directions, and with hearts bowed to His authority, owning, in simple faith, His presence in their midst, and where is the room for self-will? Where the possibility of mistake? How could anything be bound or loosed but according to His guidance?—anything asked but according to His mind?

The neglect, whether wilful or ignorant, of these conditions, has caused the wide divorce between the kingdom and the Church. Men have claimed to bind and to loose, to remit and to retain, regardless of the

terms on which this authority was bestowed. In the passages which give this power, the Church and the kingdom are viewed as one, according to God's institution. So long as the assembly was in such a state that it could enjoy the presence of Jesus and the guidance of the Spirit, the kingdom, administered by man, remained co-extensive with the Church. The moment self-will, self-dependence, or self-interest crept in, Christ's presence and the Spirit's guidance ceased to lend sanction to their acts, and the decrees of the body on earth were no longer ratified in heaven. The Church, and the kingdom as seen by God, became severed from the kingdom as ordered, or disordered, by man; the door was flung open for self, the world, and Satan to come in; the name of Christ was made to sanction every abomination and blasphemy which human or diabolic wickedness could devise; and, though the treasure still remained, dear as ever to the heart of God, Christendom, the field in which it was hid, became that hateful thing whose annals the infidel historian has justly described as "the annals of hell."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE BODY AND THE BRIDE.

IN our last chapter we learnt some important truths about the Church from our Lord's own teaching. Occupying the interval between His rejection by man and His public manifestation in the glory of the kingdom, it has an entirely exceptional position in God's dealings. It is associated with Jesus in the place He now holds as rejected by the world, so that believers are promised no other earthly portion than the cross which He bore. It is also associated with Him, however, in His acceptance as the risen One ; being founded, not on His earthly title as the Messiah, but on His heavenly dignity as "Son of the living God ;" and standing in the eternal security of that life which He possesses as the One who was dead and is alive again, so that the gates of Hades cannot prevail against it. Even as to administration, while subject to Christ's authority, what it bound and loosed was ratified in heaven.

But the character of the Church was only fully revealed after Christ's ascension. It may be asked, when did the Church come into existence ? It was

not founded when Jesus first named it, for He spoke of it as a future thing ; and being associated with His death and resurrection, it could not exist till these had taken place. There is no trace of it during Christ's lifetime, nor till the day of Pentecost. Then, however, an event occurred which we must now consider.

The Holy Spirit had worked in all ages. Souls were quickened by Him ; "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Besides these ways of acting, Joel had foretold the pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh, and John the Baptist had pointed out Jesus as the one who should baptize with the Holy Ghost. These predictions will have their complete fulfilment when Christ appears in His glory. Jesus Himself, however, speaks of a coming of the Holy Ghost, in connection, not with His return, but with His departure ; not with His earthly glory, but with His heavenly ; as poured out, not upon all flesh, but upon His own disciples. "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive, for the Holy Ghost was not yet ; because that Jesus was not yet glorified" (John vii. 37-39). Here the Spirit was only to those who believe in Jesus, and after He was glorified. So, before His departure, He says—"It is expedient for you that I go away ; for if I go not away, the Comforter will

not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you ” (John xvi. 7).

There is, then, here brought out a new work of the Spirit, connected with Christ’s absence and heavenly glory. In this new character, He was to abide with the disciples for ever (John xiv. 16), to dwell with them and to be in them (ver. 17), to teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance whatsoever Jesus had said unto them (ver. 26), to guide them into all truth and show them things to come, glorifying Christ by receiving of the things that are His, and showing them to His disciples (John xvi. 13, 14). His presence was also to “convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”

But this coming of the Spirit has still another aspect. Before His ascension, Jesus bids His disciples “wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me. For John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they, therefore, were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel ? And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you ; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth ” (Acts i. 4-8). Here Jesus promises His disciples a “baptism ” of the Holy Ghost. This



recalls the prophecies of Joel and John the Baptist, and as their prophecies are connected with national deliverance, they ask whether He would then restore the kingdom to Israel. Jesus replies that the time for this was hidden in the Father's counsels, but that as the immediate effect of the Spirit's coming, they would receive power, and should be witnesses for Him in all parts of the earth. There are, then, three things here named, the baptism of the Holy Ghost, the giving of power to the disciples, and the fitting of them to be witnesses for Christ.

In the next chapter we read that "when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place; and suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it [or they] sat upon each of them; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts ii. 1-4). This was, clearly, the fulfilment of Christ's recent words, that they should "be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." It was also, no doubt, the coming of the Spirit spoken of in the Gospel of John. Indeed the three things named by Christ in the previous chapter—the "baptism" of the Spirit, the conferring of "power" on the disciples (of which the miraculous gift of tongues was the first manifestation), and the fitting of the disciples to witness for Jesus "unto the

uttermost part of the earth"—were all simultaneous in their performance, and were all results of the same event, the sending of the Holy Ghost to take His abode in the world. But though simultaneous, they must be carefully distinguished from each other.

The "power" received was shown in the gift of tongues. Joel had foretold certain powers as the results of the Spirit's outpouring in the age to come. The age to come had not arrived, but the "powers of the age to come" were given, in a measure, to the Church. Those outwardly connected with it are described as persons who "were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and *the powers of the age to come*" (Heb. vi. 4, 5). Joel's prophecy was, therefore, partially fulfilled at Pentecost, and hence it is quoted as explaining the marvels noted by the multitude. This is the real force of our Lord's language also. When He had spoken of the baptism of the Spirit, the disciples, connecting it with the age named by Joel, asked if that age had yet come. Jesus replies that He cannot tell them about the commencement of that age, for it is a secret, but that they should receive the "power" of which the prophecy had spoken. This, then, is one of the things which we see accomplished in the next chapter.

Another thing foretold was that they were to be fitted by the Spirit to act as witnesses for Christ, and here again the Lord's words were remarkably fulfilled. The testimony borne by the disciples on that day

when the Holy Ghost descended upon them was owned to an extent without parallel in any other age. It was "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," so that three thousand persons were pricked to the heart, and bowed down to own the authority of the crucified Jesus, and to be baptized in His name. This qualification to bear witness to Jesus, though in a manner derived from their own converse with Him, was always connected with the sending of the Spirit, as Jesus had said—" *When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me, and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning*" (John xv. 26, 27).

Here, then, are two results of this sending of the Spirit; the one, in partial fulfilment of Joel's prophecy, conferring miraculous gifts, "the powers of the age to come," upon the disciples; the other, in fulfilment of our Lord's words, qualifying the disciples to be witnesses for Him in the world. But these are accompaniments of the baptism of the Spirit, not the baptism itself. There are only two events thus described. The one, the complete fulfilment of Joel's prophecy, is what happens with "blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke," before "that great and notable day of the Lord come"—an outpouring, not of grace only, but of judgment—a baptism, not merely of the Holy Ghost, but of fire. The other, a partial fulfilment of Joel's prophecy, though widely different in character

and consequences, is what took place on the day of Pentecost, and is related in the passage above cited. Since, then, this is the only baptism of the Spirit which has yet been, or which will be while the Church is on earth, it is important that we should rightly appreciate its character.

The Church, as already shown, was not founded when Christ first spoke of it to His disciples, nor is any trace of it seen before His death, or after His resurrection, until this time. In the first chapter of Acts, the disciples are assembled, but merely as a number of individual believers. Nothing as yet indicates that they were gathered in any corporate character. At the close of the next chapter, however, which describes the baptism of the Holy Ghost, we read that the Church, till then spoken of only as a future thing, was already in existence, for "the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved" (Acts ii. 47). The baptism of the Holy Ghost foretold by Joel and John the Baptist is connected with the establishment of the kingdom in power and righteousness. The baptism of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost is connected with the establishment of the Church. As the kingdom in its mysterious form is a partial fulfilment of the prophetic kingdom, so the baptism of the Spirit at Pentecost is a partial fulfilment of the baptism of the Spirit foretold by the prophets.

The effect, then, of the baptism of the Holy Ghost was to gather into one body or assembly those who,

before this event, were nothing more than individual believers. Up to this time they had been, like the Old Testament saints, "just men," each having life, each quickened by the Spirit, each the object of God's favour and grace. Now, by the baptism of the Holy Ghost, they are formed into God's assembly or Church. Nor is this merely an inference from the fact that the Church is first named immediately after this baptism had taken place. The Apostle Paul, speaking of the Church as the body of Christ, expressly says that "by one Spirit are we all *baptized* into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. xii. 13). Whatever, then, the other ways in which the Spirit acts, the effect of the "baptism" of the Holy Ghost, promised by our Lord just before His ascension, and fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, was to form into one assembly the isolated, and even antagonistic, elements composing 'the Church; so that, instead of merely being a number of individual believers, they become, in Scripture language, members of the same body, as closely connected with each other and with Christ, as limb with limb, or as all the limbs with the head.

This, then, is the real character and effect of the "baptism" of the Holy Ghost. To apply the name to a great work in the way of conversions is simply a mistake. No doubt the two things happened together at Pentecost, and no doubt the conversions then wrought were the result of that testimony which



the coming of the Spirit fitted the disciples to bear. But the coming of the Holy Ghost promised in John's Gospel, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost promised in the first chapter of Acts, are quite different in character and object, though both form parts of the same great transaction, the descent of the Spirit to abide on earth as the representative of Christ during His absence. The *coming* of the Spirit gave power for testimony; the *baptism* of the Spirit formed the disciples into one body or assembly. The two things were quite distinct—simultaneous, but not synonymous.

Not only is it a mistake, therefore, to ask for a "baptism of the Spirit," which confounds the baptism with the coming; but it is equally a mistake to pray for a descent, an outpouring, or a coming of the Spirit. The Spirit has come, has descended, and is already here. All the three results of the Spirit's descent at Pentecost were results attained once for all. The powers were conferred once for all, the fitness to bear testimony was bestowed once for all, the assembly was formed once for all. It is true, of course, that persons individually receive the Spirit, and individually become members of the assembly, as they themselves believe in Jesus. Thus when Peter went to Cornelius, "the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word" (Acts x. 44). This, however, is not the result of another sending or baptism of the Holy Ghost, but of the individual being brought into the sphere of the Spirit's operations. A company



may to-day be exercising the powers conferred by a charter granted more than a couple of centuries ago. It is not necessary to the validity of their acts that the charter should be renewed with each generation of those who exercise the authority it bestows. So the baptism of the Spirit, forming and indwelling the Church, is an act performed once for all ; and every person who, by grace, believes on Jesus as his Saviour, is as much baptized by that one act, as completely incorporated in the body of Christ, as though he had been one of the hundred and twenty on whom the Spirit sat, like cloven tongues of fire, on the day of Pentecost.

By the baptism of the Spirit, then, the Church has been formed into a body, consisting of many members, but yet one, “ for as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ ” (1 Cor. xii. 12). This is, perhaps, the most striking, and certainly the most frequent, figure used in Scripture to describe the Church. In the passage just cited, the length to which the metaphor is carried is very remarkable. Not merely is the body said to be united with Christ, but to be Christ Himself—“ so also is Christ.” The limbs, so to speak, are regarded as being merely attached to the Head, which gives motion, life, and character to the whole, so that it is all spoken of under the name of the Head. It is not, perhaps, easy to grasp the full force of this remarkable language, which appears so to lose the Church in Christ, that He alone

is seen, and it is regarded merely as a part of Him. But though our minds may fail to mount to the full height of blessing revealed in the figure, it is at least manifest that a closeness and completeness of union is here made known which may well fill the soul of the believer with wonder and adoration.

In the Epistle to the Romans, which is not a Church epistle, the same metaphor is used, not as a doctrinal exposition of the nature of the Church, but as enforcing the obligation of every believer to act according to the gift bestowed upon him. This makes its use the more striking, because it shows how familiar the idea was to the early converts, even before the full unfolding which it received in the later Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians. The apostle says to the Romans, "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. xii. 4, 5). In these passages it must be noted that the members are individual believers, not different local assemblies, much less different voluntary associations, self-styled "Churches," divided from each other on points of doctrine, discipline, and order. The idea of different sects being the different members, and forming the one body, is not found in these passages, and can only have originated in a culpable negligence as to their real import. Whether this division into sects and denominations is in harmony or in conflict with Scripture, is honouring or grieving to the Spirit of

God, we shall inquire hereafter, but the slightest attention to the passages quoted will show that, at all events, it is not the state of things to which allusion is there made. These passages, on the contrary, teach that there is but one body ; that this is the body of Christ, or even, in the words written to the Corinthians, Christ Himself ; that each individual believer is a member of that single body ; and that all believers, being thus united, are members one of another.

In the Epistle to the Colossians the same figure is frequently used. Speaking of Christ, the apostle writes—"And He is the Head of the body, the Church ; who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in all things He might have the pre-eminence" (Col. i. 18). In the very first shadowing forth of the Church, Jesus associates it with Himself as the "Son of the living God," and as the One who should die and rise again. This is in beautiful harmony with the text just quoted. The passage from which that text is taken unfolds the varied glories of Christ as at once "the image of the invisible God," and "the first-born of every creature." But besides being the only "creature" who ever was, or could be, "the image of the invisible God," He is also "the Head of the body, the Church," and, in association with this glory, He is further entitled "the beginning, the first-born from among the dead." Thus we again find His headship of the Church brought out in connection with His Divine nature on

the one hand, and His death and resurrection on the other.

Another passage in the same chapter presents the truth of the believer's union with Christ in a touching manner. The apostle speaks of himself as filling "up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church" (Col. i. 24). The first lesson which Saul of Tarsus, the bitter persecutor, had been taught by Christ was in these words—"I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest" (Acts ix. 5). The Lord was going afterwards to "shew him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake" (ver. 16). Both these lessons Paul had learnt. If "the excellency of the power" of God was to be manifested in him, he must have the treasure in an earthen vessel; he must be always "bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest" in his body. The working of the flesh needed to be kept down by these sufferings. But how does Paul speak of them? He speaks of them, even as Jesus had spoken to him, as "the sufferings of Christ." He had learnt on the way to Damascus how Christ, the Head, suffers with the feeblest of His members, and now, when called to suffer for Christ's sake, He delights to recall that scene, and to remember how He on whose behalf these afflictions were borne, felt them as though each pang were inflicted upon Himself. No language could more beautifully show the living union between the believer and Christ.

Nor is it merely that Christ feels with the members, but that the members are nourished by Christ. Thus the Colossians are warned against the seductions of those who are "not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God" (Col. ii. 19). The teaching of this passage will come before us presently. I would only just notice, in passing, the variety of forms in which the same figure is used, and the variety of purposes to which it is applied. It is again employed in exhortation: "Let the peace of Christ [not God] rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body" (Col. iii. 15). Why are the Colossian saints here reminded of this truth? To give point to the preceding exhortations, in which they are entreated to put on "bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering," to forgive like Christ Himself, to show "love, which is the bond of perfectness," and to "let the peace of Christ rule" in their hearts. This oneness of the body was no theoretical creed, received as a doctrine, but rejected as a fact; no visionary abstraction, to be realised in heaven, but unsuited for earth. It was a practical thing, for the maintenance and display of which believers were made responsible down here, a living truth to be recognised and acted upon in daily life. The Christian's conduct is to be conformed to his relationships. Why, then, is he to show kindness, forbearance, and love, to his fellow-believer? Because



they are called into one body. So real was the oneness in and with Christ to the hearts of the early disciples!

In the Epistle to the Ephesians the figure again appears. Speaking of the condition of the Gentiles, who had formerly been "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise," he says—"But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in Himself, of twain, one new man" (Eph. ii. 12-15). What is this "new man?" It is not a literal man, of course, for how could a literal man be composed of two men, Jew and Gentile? Besides, this "one new man," made out of twain, is formed "in Himself," that is, in Christ. It can, then, be none other than that "new man," or that "one body," spoken of in Corinthians as Christ, or the body of Christ. It is the Church, in which all earthly distinctions, even those instituted by God Himself, disappear. Here the Church and Christ are again regarded as forming "one new man," a mystical unity which blends together the most discordant materials, Jew and Gentile being made one in Him with whom they were both joined and in whom they were both accepted.

Hence the exhortation is afterwards addressed to



them, that they should endeavour "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," for, adds the apostle, "there is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. iv. 3-6). Here, again, we find the truth practically applied in a way which shows that this oneness of the body was not regarded as an invisible, impalpable thing, never intended to be discerned on earth save by the eye of God, but as the normal condition of the Church, for the outward preservation of which believers were responsible. The Holy Ghost teaches that there is but one body, and that for this reason we are to endeavour "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." How is this to be done? By breaking the one body, as to its outward manifestation, into fifty or a hundred different and rival bodies? If not, then Christendom has failed, and this divided condition of the Church is in direct contradiction to the express teaching of the Word of God.

But the dignity and glory of this one body are further unfolded in a striking manner in this epistle. It is said of Christ that God "hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. i. 22, 23). Here, it will be observed, we have two headships of a very different character. That He is the Head of the

Church is obvious, because the Church is spoken of as His body. But, besides this, He is presented to the Church as "Head over all," that is, as the One whom God, having already exalted and set in the highest place at His own right hand, will make Heir of all things, the acknowledged and undisputed Head of the whole universe, reigning "till He hath put all enemies under His feet." In this character, as Head over all things, He has associated with Him, not as part of the realm over which He reigns, but as part, so to speak, of Himself, "the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."

And this carries the mind forward to another figure used to illustrate the same relationship, a figure closely connected, and indeed inseparably intertwined, with the one we have just been looking at. Among the practical exhortations at the close of the epistle, the writer says—"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church; for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones" (Eph. v. 25-30). What a wondrous unfolding of the tender love of Christ to

the Church ! What a blessed revelation of the nearness and sacredness of the union subsisting between them ! Here we see enacted in the last Adam that which is so beautifully typified in the first. The first Adam was head of creation, but he was alone, with no help meet for him. "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone ; I will make him an help meet for him. . . . And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept ; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof ; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh ; she shall be called woman (*Isha*), because she was taken out of man (*Ish*). Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife ; and they shall be one flesh " (Gen. ii. 18-24).

The last Adam has gone through all that is here divinely prefigured. He, too, was alone ; the Head, by God's anointing, of everything ; but as long as He lived, He abode alone. The deep, deep sleep of death has passed by God's ordinance upon Him ; and now, having fallen into the ground and died, He can bring forth much fruit. But what is the *first*-fruit of this deep sleep ? God has formed out of His very self, bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh, the bride, the object to which His heart can cleave, which He can take to be one with Himself. Can He hate it ? Surely not, it is " His own flesh," and as

such He “nourisheth and cherisheth it.” Truly He is the Head, but does He class His bride with the subjects over whom He reigns by God’s anointing? Was Eve in the same relationship with Adam as the creation over which he ruled? No more is the Church in the same relationship with Christ as the other subjects of His dominion. He is Head to the Church, and Head over all things. But to the Church He is Head as the husband is head of the wife; to all things else He is Head as a king is head over his subjects. Adam was head to Eve, but Eve was the partner of Adam in his headship over creation. In like manner Christ is Head to the Church, but the Church is the partner of Christ in His headship over all things.

And this shows us the difference between millennial and Church blessings. The millennial saints will enjoy every advantage that a redeemed earth can yield under Christ’s government. The saint now is set in a groaning creation, in a world lying in the wicked one, and is called to be a partaker of Christ’s sufferings. But the millennial saint will only know Christ as a benign and gracious sovereign, as the Anointed of God carrying out His thoughts of blessing to the earth. The saint now knows Christ as His companion—he is at present the sharer of His sufferings, and when He comes in His glory, he will be the sharer of His throne. Such is the faithful word. “If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Tim. ii. 12). “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit

with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father in His throne" (Rev. iii. 21). Where is anything like this said of the millennial saints? Take the most favoured people during that blessed epoch, and mark what is said about them. "He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever" (Luke i. 33). Christ reigns, then, *over* Israel as a king. The Church, on the other hand, reigns *with* Christ. He is never called king of the Church, but of Israel. Reigning with Him, on the contrary, is never ascribed to Israel, but to the Church.

The assembly of God, then, the body and the bride of Christ, occupies a higher place than either the Old Testament or the millennial saints. The "just men made perfect," however blessed their lot, are not brought into that nearness of relationship which is accorded to the "Church of the first-born," the first-fruits of His redemption toil. The millennial saint, too, surrounded with all that ministers to delight here below, with the law written in his heart, and rejoicing in all the blessings of the new covenant, will never be in the same blessed intimacy, the same hallowed oneness, with Christ, into which the feeblest member of His body is now brought. In heavenly glory we see the bride, the Lamb's wife, in all the perfect beauty she will possess when Christ shall "present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing," but "holy and without blemish." "And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine



linen, clean, and white, for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of saints " (Rev. xix. 8).

There will then be no need of cleansing, but now while still in the world, liable to contract defilement, or to be led away into false paths by the subtle craft of Satan, she needs the constant, tender watchfulness of her risen Head, to cleanse and to guard her. And how does He meet this daily need? Should she contract defilement by the way, He comes in to sanctify and cleanse with the "washing of water by the word." Should she be in danger of wandering through the false suggestions of Satan, He sends His faithful apostle to lift up the voice of earnest and affectionate exhortation, recalling her to her blessed place of privilege, and warning her against the snares of the deceiver. "For I am jealous over you," says he, "with godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear lest, by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. xi. 2, 3). How exquisitely tender the love of Christ for His bride as brought out in these passages! Not less beautiful is the figure in which Scripture describes His mode of nourishing and cherishing her, exhorting believers to "grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of



every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. iv. 15, 16). Love is what builds it up, love flowing from the Head, and causing it to grow up "into Him."

Such, then, is the Church, as seen and known of God. Man was left responsible for preserving it according to God's thoughts, and in this, as in all else, he has mournfully failed. But man's failure, though it may shroud the true glory of the Church here, can never veil it from "the principalities and powers in heavenly places," or sink it to a lower level in the purposes of God and the affections of Christ. It still stands forth, and will to all eternity endure, the brightest display of God's wisdom and grace, the first and most glorious trophy of redeeming love. In a world that has both seen and hated both Christ and the Father, it remains to witness for Him in the scene of Satan's power, and to await His return to take it to the Father's house. Called, not with an earthly, but with a heavenly, calling; built upon Christ, not in His earthly, but in His heavenly, character; associated with Him, not in His earthly, but in His heavenly, acceptance; blessed in Him with all spiritual blessings, not in earthly, but in heavenly, places; made meet, as seen in Him, not for an earthly, but for a heavenly, inheritance; and expecting His advent to bring it, not into earthly, but into heavenly, delights; it is altogether heavenly in its character, associations, and destiny, and the earth is to it only the

place of its wilderness pilgrimage. It is formed by a heavenly Person, united with a heavenly Head, animated by a heavenly hope, and called upon for a heavenly walk. Fellow-believers, "what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!"

And deeply conscious as we are, and must be, of our own and the Church's failure, is it not most blessed, in the scene of ruin and shipwreck around us, to call to mind that God's love can never weary and God's purposes can never change—that where our eye can detect nothing but chaos, His can still find Divine order? Is it not most profitable, too, to turn away our gaze from the tangled web of man's scheming to the clear and wondrous designs of God; and to seek, amidst the bewildering jungle which has overgrown God's divinely-appointed road, for His guidance still to trace the path that He would have us to follow? Certain we may be of this, that neither the failure of the professing Church, nor the intrusion of a godless world, nor the devices of a subtle enemy, can altogether obliterate—however sadly they may obscure—the highway which God's truth has traced for His children to walk in. And certain we may be, also, that the more difficult the way is to trace, the more need we have of diligent search in order that we may find it, and the richer will be the blessing and reward of walking faithfully in it. With the living Word of God as our rule, with the Spirit of God to unfold its wisdom to

our hearts, and with a single eye to walk in obedience to His Divine guidance, the path through all this tangled labyrinth may still be found. We have long since exhausted our own resources ; but we have not, and we never shall have, exhausted God's.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE MYSTERY.

THE Church is the body and bride of Christ. It occupies an exceptional place in God's dealings, being heavenly in character and calling, and thus differing from everything related or foretold in the Old Testament as to what preceded and will follow it on the earth. It did not exist till after Christ's resurrection, being associated with Him as the risen One at God's right hand. Not only, however, did the Church not exist in the Old Testament times, but it was not foretold. Though God's purposes about it were formed "before the foundation of the world," they were hidden "from ages and from generations" till His own time for revealing them.

These secret counsels of God are called in Scripture mysteries. We mean by a mystery something inexplicable, beyond our understandings. In the language of the New Testament, however, a mystery is simply a secret revealed only to initiated persons—such, for example, as the secret sign of the "Free-Masons." God, then, had reserved a secret to be communicated to us—a secret which He had not made known even

to the most favoured recipient of His thoughts in past ages. How sweet to see this ! It is the privilege of the children to know the secrets of the family—of the wife to share the innermost thoughts of her husband's heart. God has adopted us as His children ; Christ has purchased us as His bride ; and the secrets, hidden even from the most honoured of His servants and friends, are now breathed into the ear and heart of that Church which is bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh.

These mysteries relate partly to the kingdom and partly to the Church. That there would be a kingdom of the heavens, in which evil would be allowed, was a secret unknown to the prophets. This is the mystery disclosed in the parable of the wheat and the tares. But there is also a secret connected with the Church or assembly. We read that God “did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name” (Acts xv. 14). This is said to be His present work, and the account goes on to show that it was in accordance with His revealed purposes, for He had announced by the prophets that His name would be called upon the Gentiles. But the Scriptures are quoted here only to prove that God had never intended to confine His blessings to Israel. On looking further into the Word, we find that there is a “mystery,” or secret, connected with this subject, which the Old Testament had not made known. Writing to the Romans the apostle says—“I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this *mystery*, lest ye

should be wise in your own conceits ; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in " (Rom. xi. 25). It *had* been revealed that God would be merciful to the Gentiles ; but that God was setting aside the Jews for the very purpose of gathering a people out of the Gentiles, and that *until* this was fully accomplished the blessing of Israel must be postponed, was a " mystery " on which the Old Testament Scriptures were wholly silent. The Epistle to the Romans is not, indeed, a Church epistle, and therefore neither the name nor the character of the Church is to be found in this passage. But the people that God is gathering out of the Gentiles are believers, and it is for the completion of these, or the Church, that Israel is set aside as God's immediate earthly object.

The Old Testament which unfolds God's plans concerning the world, shows the converse of this. There the Gentiles fill up the interval in God's dealings with His earthly people, Israel, and are used to provoke them to jealousy. But the New Testament reveals God's heavenly purposes. Here, therefore, the gathering of the Church, instead of occupying a mere gap in God's earthly designs, is the grand object of all His counsels. In the Old Testament, Gentile blessing is named, but as waiting on God's thoughts about Israel. In the New Testament, Israel's blessing is named, but as waiting upon God's thoughts about the Church. The Old Testament shows a people who were the objects of God's counsels "*from* the foundation of the



world ;” but the New Testament shows a people who were the objects of God’s counsels “*before* the foundation of the world ” (Matt. xxv. 34 ; Eph. i. 4). In God’s earthly plans, everything yields to the former ; in His heavenly plans everything yields to the latter. But as the heavenly people had the first and highest place in God’s thoughts, the earthly people must stand aside until His purposes concerning these are fully accomplished.

But, it may be asked, are not Jews now brought in also ? Is not the Gospel as free to them as to others ? Why, then, is it said that Israel is blinded in part “until the fulness of the *Gentiles* be come in ?” It is because the apostle is here speaking of the Church dispensationally, as the thing which came in through Israel’s blindness, and is incompatible with her national blessing. In this dispensational sense, the Church is Gentile, and does not cease to be so because individual Israelites enter. In doing so, they take the same ground as the Gentiles ; as Peter says—“We (the Jews) shall be saved, even as they” (Acts xv. 11) ; and become detached from the nation as here represented. Christianity, thus viewed, is the bringing in of the fulness of the Gentiles in contrast with God’s still future work of restoring and blessing Israel. This is the “mystery,” as seen in the Epistle to the Romans.

In writing to the Colossians, Paul speaks of “the dispensation of God which is given to me for you to fulfil [complete] the word of God, even the mystery

which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints ; to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles ; which is Christ in [or among] you, the hope of glory ” (Col. i. 25-27). The mystery was, therefore, needed “to complete the word of God.” It was the presence of Christ in or among believers, as the hope of glory. The Word does not say, that the mystery was the presence of Christ among the Gentiles, but “among you,” that is, in the Church. Christ’s presence among the Jews was foretold ; but now His presence is revealed in an assembly outside Judaism, where Jew and Gentile were unknown. This was a mystery, which was now revealed to the Gentiles.

And not only was Christ’s presence now vouchsafed to an assembly unknown to the prophets. There was also another new thing. His presence, foretold by the prophets, was not a *hope* of glory, but glory itself. When Christ reigns among the Jews, He will be their glory—“a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel ” (Luke ii. 32). Now, however, something altogether different is seen. Instead of glorifying those among whom He has taken His abode, He only gives them “the hope of glory.” At present they are members of His body. But the sufferings of that body are not yet filled up, and believers are now called out to fellowship with His sufferings, though with the blessed and assured hope of soon sharing His glory. This is a thing unknown to

the old prophets, another feature of the mystery now revealed to the saints.

We are here carried a step further than in the Romans. There the mystery is that God has set aside Jewish blessing until He has performed a work among the Gentiles, that is, in a sphere outside His earthly dealings. In the Epistle to the Colossians it is added that among those whom God is gathering as the result of His present work, Christ makes His abode, spiritually of course, and this, not as the bestower of present, but as the hope of future, glory.

In Ephesians the mystery is thus described—"that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph. iii. 6). This is called "the mystery of Christ." What, then, does it teach? It is often understood as showing that the Gentiles are by the gospel brought into Jewish blessings. But this is simply to deny the truth of prophecy. The prophetic blessings of the Jews are essentially national, and would be absolutely extinguished if the difference between Jew and Gentile were abolished. Besides, the word elsewhere expressly declares that the special Jewish blessings are postponed *until* God's present work, that is, the thing here described, has been accomplished. This passage, then, does not, and cannot, mean that the Gentile is brought into possession, through Christianity, of the blessings prophetically foretold for the Jews.

Let us examine its language a little more closely. It asserts that the Gentiles are "fellow-heirs and of

the same body, and partakers of God's promise in Christ by the gospel." With whom are they fellow-heirs? They are, as we know from other scriptures, fellow-heirs, and of the same body with Christ; but is this what is meant here? Evidently not, for it could not be said that they are partakers *with Christ* of God's "promise in Christ by the gospel." In this last case it manifestly means partakers with the Jews, and if one portion refers to the common possession of Jew and Gentile, the others must do the same. The passage says, then, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs with the Jews, of the same body with the Jews, and partakers with the Jews of God's promise in Christ by the gospel.

But this might be either by the Gentile coming into Jewish blessing, or by Jew and Gentile receiving some common blessing of quite a different kind. It cannot, as we have seen, be in the former way, for the nature of Jewish blessing and the express teaching of God's Word forbid the thought of the Gentile sharing, on equal terms, the blessing foretold for the Jews. In this case, however, we are not left to inference, even to inference so plain as that which is thus thrust upon us. We learn from the immediate context what this body is, in which Jew and Gentile are incorporated, and find that it is none other than the body of Christ Himself. "He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to

make in Himself of twain one new man " (Eph. ii. 14, 15). Earlier in the Epistle we read that in Christ "also we have obtained an inheritance" (chap. i. 11).

What, then, is the apostle's reasoning? What the mystery which he here unfolds? Having spoken of an inheritance and of a body—the inheritance we have in Christ, and the body in which we are incorporated with Christ—he goes on to say, that in this inheritance, in this body, in the glorious promises unfolded in the gospel, the Gentile is fellow-heir, of the same body, and partaker of the promises, along with the Jew. It is not the Gentile coming into the Jewish hope, but Jew and Gentile being brought into the same hope, quite different from that of Israel. Where is the Jewish nation spoken of as being of the same body with Christ? This is not a prophetic hope at all, but a mystery now first made known. And how do any persons get into this same body? By those who are Gentiles becoming Jews? So far from it, that the wall of partition broken down is the special Jewish distinction, and if either could be said to approach the other, it is the Jew who approximates to the Gentile condition rather than the Gentile who approximates to the Jewish. But, in reality, there is no such approach on either side. Both are taken out of their old condition, and brought into an entirely new one. The two classes of Jew and Gentile still subsist in the world, but God has taken a number out of each, and has formed a new class, the body of Christ, in which all distinctions are done away. The three

divisions which God now owns are the Jew, the Gentile, and the Church of God (1 Cor. x. 32).

Afterwards, in the same epistle, Paul writes—"We are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church" (Eph. v. 30-32). Here, then, the mystery is expressly stated to be the union of Christ and the Church, so that they are "one flesh," and so that believers are "members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones."

In whatever light, therefore, the Church is regarded, it is spoken of as a mystery. Whether as the thing which God is now doing among the Gentiles during the time of Israel's rejection; as the place in which Christ now makes His spiritual abode, the pledge of coming glory; as the body in which Jew and Gentile are alike incorporated on an entirely new ground; or as the bride, joined in one flesh with Christ Himself; it is a new thing, a secret "hid from ages and from generations"—a mystery, outside the sphere of God's earthly dealings, and reserved for the ear of those whom God has brought into relationship with His Son in heavenly glory—those to whom He has made known by His Spirit the things which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man."

But was this mystery really hidden from the Old Testament prophets? Does not Paul speak of it as revealed to the prophets as well as to the apostles?



Does he not expressly say that it was made known "by the scriptures of the prophets?" Let us look at his own words. He speaks of "the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets [properly, prophetic writings], according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith" (Rom. xvi. 25, 26). So, too, he mentions his "knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. iii. 4, 5). Surely no person of ordinary intelligence can read these passages without seeing that the prophetic writings, and the prophets here spoken of, are not those of the Old Testament, in whose days the text plainly shows that the mystery was not revealed, but prophets then living and the prophetic writings then issued—in a word, the prophets and prophetic writings of the New Testament.

Such, then, was the mystery now first revealed to the Church. Doubtless there are other mysteries disclosed in the New Testament also. There is "the mystery of iniquity," the present unrevealed form of that evil whose full and unhindered display was prophesied of by Isaiah, Daniel, and other Old Testament writers. There is "the mystery of godliness," the complete revelation of God in the person of the Son, as contrasted with the partial revelations previously made; God "manifest in the flesh, justified in the

Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Tim. iii. 16). There is the mystery of Christ's special and separate return for His saints—"We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. xv. 51, 52). In these, as in other cases where the word is used, it is some new revelation suited to the heavenly character of the Church, or to the present nature of God's dealings viewed as an interruption of the course of earthly events foretold in the old prophets.

But the special mystery committed to the apostle Paul is that which we have just examined, the mystery of the Church as the body and the bride of Christ. Why, it may be asked, was this kept a secret? Because it is a heavenly thing, the subject of God's heavenly counsels; whereas the purpose of the Old Testament prophecies is to make known His earthly counsels. This is of great importance as showing how completely the Church lies outside the world. It has a different origin, it is revealed at a different time, it cherishes a different hope, it belongs to a different sphere. Instead of inheriting the Old Testament promises and fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies, it forms the most absolute contrast with them that the mind can conceive. So different are they that the two cannot exist together. While God's purposes about the earth were being unfolded, the mystery of the

Church was hidden. When the mystery of the Church was unfolded, the purposes about the earth were suspended. The Church is associated with Christ in heaven ; Israel is associated with Him on earth. The Church knows Him in His sufferings and patience ; Israel will know Him in His exaltation and power. The Church rejoices in Him as the bride in her bridegroom ; Israel will rejoice in Him as a nation in her sovereign. The Church looks for Him to take her to heaven ; Israel looks for Him to establish her in the earth. Such is our blessed lot, such our heavenly portion, in contrast with even the most favoured of the earthly people. Alas, that our hearts fall so far short of this wondrous position !

However we may slight it, the apostle Paul did not. Earnest as he was in seeking souls, full as he was in setting forth the simple truth of grace to the sinner, this magnificent subject of "the mystery of Christ" was never absent from his thoughts or heart. If he prayed for the establishment of saints, it was "according to the mystery." If he would have them "knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding," it is "to the acknowledgment of the mystery." If he requests their prayers, it is "that God would open unto us a door of utterance to speak the mystery." If he would have the real character of the truth committed to him understood, it is that God had by revelation "made known unto me the mystery." And this mystery is the Church, as the body and the bride of Christ, already united with

Him by the Holy Ghost sent down to dwell on earth, and awaiting the time when this blessed oneness will be publicly displayed ; “ when Christ, who is our life, shall appear,” and we also shall “ appear with Him in glory.” Surely if our hearts were more in tune with the mind of God and with the affections of Christ, this wondrous theme would fill us with never-ceasing worship and delight !

## CHAPTER IV.

### A CHRISTIAN NOT OF THE WORLD.

THE Epistle to the Ephesians, after blessedly unfolding the mystery of the Church, continues—"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Eph. iv. 1). Law made standing to depend on walk. Grace makes walk to depend on standing. It sets us in heavenly places in Christ, and then demands a walk worthy of the position. This is God's present way, as remote from legalism on the one hand as from antinomianism on the other; equally clear in rejecting good works as the *ground* of acceptance, and in demanding them as the *result* of acceptance; proclaiming with the same emphasis that there can be no fruit *except* we abide in the vine, and that there must be fruit *if* we abide in the vine.

In an army each soldier is personally responsible to his sovereign. If there is a mutiny, and each regiment, under a different leader, pursues its own ends, pleading the sovereign's commission, the course for one who would act loyally is to learn, if possible, what the sovereign's commands really are, and to

separate from all who are not faithfully obeying them. Such a divided and mutinous army is Christendom, but happily the course which might be impossible for the soldier, is possible for one who would walk in subjection to Christ. To give ear to the jarring voices of man is to plunge into a whirlpool of confusion and contradiction. To follow, with a single eye, the teaching of God's Word is to ensure safety at every step of our journey.

The walk of the individual Christian, then, must be suited to his calling in Christ. As a member of His body, he must behave consistently. If the body is not of the world, he is not of the world; if the body is heavenly, he is heavenly. As the whole body should manifest its true character, so should each member. Now the Church is separate from the world, united with Christ in heaven, incorporated with Christ and indwelt by the Spirit. If, then, the believer is to walk worthy of his vocation, such is the character which he is to exhibit in the world.

Looking at the matter from this point of view, what is the walk which would befit a Christian? Having a heavenly calling, how could he mix himself with the pleasures, the politics, the vanities, and the ambitions, of the world? The ball, the theatre, the concert, would be avoided, not because natural conscience condemned them, but as inconsistent with the believer's vocation. Are such scenes, he would ask, suited for one who is associated with Christ in death and resurrection, who belongs to heaven, and is waiting the



return of the Saviour to take him there? How can I enjoy the pleasures and frivolities of a world from which I am severed by my heavenly calling—a world which hates my heavenly Head and contemns my heavenly hope—a world which is rushing on at express rate to the fearful judgments that precede the day of the Lord? Would the honours, the applause, or the high places of such a doomed world attract his heart? Would he not say, like Daniel, as he saw the judgment of Babylon traced by God's finger on the wall—"Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king and make known to him the interpretation." What would Belshazzar and his lords have thought of Daniel's interpretation, if they had seen him clutching at power and place in the city whose overthrow he had foretold? And what can the world think as it sees believers grasping at the empty distinctions of a scene on which the shadow of approaching judgment already rests? Surely it is for those who can read the handwriting to be solemnly warning the world, instead of chasing its fleeting honours or bidding for its worthless applause.

There are, doubtless, believers who take part in the world's concerns from generous and philanthropic motives—simply with a desire to do good, to relieve sufferings, or to check the aboundings of iniquity. We cannot question their benevolence, their high principle, or their sincere desire to do God service. But the purest motives will not lead a Christian right,

if he fails to understand his heavenly calling ; and the question still remains whether these believers, sincere and excellent as they are, have entered into God's thoughts about what He would have them to do.

If God were still carrying out His earthly purposes, if His design now were to bless or to improve the world, such a course as that indicated might be the right one for a believer to pursue. But such is not the case. The world is not going on to blessing, but to judgment, and a Christian is called to walk in separation from it. If he seeks to follow the guidance of Scripture alone, what would he say, then, to the idea of attempting, by political and social means, to improve the world ? Would he not say—God has reserved the blessing of the earth till Christ comes ; am I, then, to attempt it earlier ? or can I, by going on without God, answer any good purpose ? Am I more conscious of the evil than He is, or better able to redress it ? If He has clearly foretold that the world is hastening on to the judgment it has incurred by rejecting Christ, can I arrest the judgment by my efforts, or shall I entangle myself in the system which is thus awaiting its doom ? I am called to fellowship with Christ, and if He has bid Christ wait, shall not I, His fellow-heir, wait with Him ? If God is now calling a people outside the world, is not this my place, instead of plunging into the thick of its affairs, hoping to bless where God is purposing to judge ? I cannot, by becoming responsible for the world's government, hope to avert the sentence. And as no man

would paint and ornament a house whose foundations he knew to be giving way, the mere attempt to improve the world shows that I am not expecting its judgment, and helps to foster the delusion that peace and safety are ahead instead of the sudden destruction which God's Word announces. True benevolence demands that I warn those inside of its impending fall, instead of lulling them into security by joining in its decoration.

All, this, however, it may be contended, is mere inference from the general principle that the Church is heavenly in character. Is this inference supported by the directions given in the Word as to the walk of individual Christians? It is clear that the early disciples were called to share their Master's rejection. "If any man," says our Lord, "will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me" (Matt. xvi. 24). He Himself was giving up the place of earthly power, and taking that of earthly rejection. So long as such is His attitude towards the world, that is, until His kingdom is established in glory, this is the fellowship into which He calls His disciples. It is no remote inference, but a direct, express statement. The cross was the punishment of felons and slaves, not only a cruel, but a shameful death. To take up the cross was to assume a position outside the world, the object of the world's enmity and contempt. This, then, is what Jesus calls His disciples to do. Nor did this cease with His death. "If the world hate you," He said, "ye know that it

hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own ; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you ; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also " (John xv. 18-20).

This shows what the early disciples were to expect. Will it be said that the world has changed ? that Christianity has so spread as to make such language inapplicable now ? In the first of the passages just quoted Jesus joins His followers with Himself in rejection. For how long ? No time is named, but as He utters these words in taking up the Church character and laying aside the Messianic, it seems clear that the rejection of His followers lasts during this state of things. In His Messiahship, He will be exalted and His followers with Him. This conclusion is confirmed by the other passage cited, which contrasts two classes, the world and those who are "not of the world." These are spoken of as opposed, not for a time, but in character and principle, and therefore as long as the age lasts. It is asserted generally that believers are "not of the world," and are, therefore, the objects of the world's hatred.

I admit that the outward marks of this antagonism are much effaced. Religion has become worldly, and the world has become religious. Christians, forgetting their heavenly calling, have struck hands with the

world, bid for its favours and places, plunged into its pleasures and pursuits, and earned its patronage and rewards. But does this alter the Word of God, which says that the believer is "not of the world," or that the world hates what is not of itself? Alas! we measure God's truth by our own failures, and because the world tolerates a worldly Christianity, conclude that Christ and the world are reconciled! They are not; and if there is a truce between the world and His followers, it proves no change of the world towards Him, but the lukewarmness of those who profess His name. Scripture, instead of teaching that the spread of Christian profession would soften the distinction between true believers and the world, makes it one of the heaviest charges against the professing Church, that it has committed fornication with the kings of the earth. The commerce between the Church and the world is infidelity to Christ. The amity between them shows, not the conversion of the world to Christianity, but the conformity of Christians to the world.

Indeed, when we look at the descriptions uniformly given of the world in the New Testament, it is amazing that there can be any doubt upon the subject. What is the world, as there portrayed? An organised system of things, with Satan at its head. When the devil took Jesus into a high mountain, and "showed unto Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time," his offer was—"All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me,



and to whomsoever I will I give it" (Luke iv. 6). Of course the Son of God does not acknowledge his right to this dominion, but at the same time He does not deny the fact. On the contrary, He more than once acknowledges it. Thus, when speaking of His death, He says—"Now is the judgment of this world, now shall *the prince of this world* be cast out" (John xii. 31). Here He is looking to the results of His death, which are regarded as immediately following, though in reality they have not yet been accomplished. Who, then, is "the prince of this world?" It cannot be Himself, for He says soon afterwards—"The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me" (John xiv. 30). He also speaks of the Holy Ghost as convicting the world "of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged" (John xvi. 11). The prince of this world, then, here spoken of is not Christ, but one who has nothing in Christ, one who is judged and cast out by Him. It can be none other than Satan, who had before made this claim without contradiction in Christ's presence.

Nor did the work of the cross immediately dispossess Satan of this usurped dominion, any more than it immediately brought judgment on the world or drew all men to Christ. After His death, Satan's power is still recognised. Thus we are told, by the Apostle Paul, that "*the god of this world* hath blinded the minds of them which believe not" (2 Cor. iv. 4). Writing to the Ephesians, he says—"In time past ye walked according to the course of



this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. ii. 2). Later in the epistle he writes—"We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in heavenly places" (vi. 12). What is the darkness of this world? Christ is the light, and that which rejects Christ is blinded by "the god of this world," and is in darkness. The world, then, as distinguished from believers, who "are not of this world," has a ruler, and that ruler is Satan. In writing to the Colossians (i. 13), the apostle says that God "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." Who "the power of darkness" is, we see from the text last quoted. It is from his dominion that grace has delivered us, and the world, those who are not delivered, are still under him. John, too, in like manner, declares that "we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one" (1 John v. 19). This is very solemn, for it shows not only that Satan has great power of evil in the world, but that the world is looked at in Scripture as an organised system of which Satan is the head, the prince, and the god.

We need not say that this power is not absolute, that it does not prevent God working in His providence, or carrying out His great governmental purposes. To what extent Satan's power reaches, it would, perhaps, be very difficult to say, and it is no

part of our object to discuss. Two facts are, however, to be noted—first, that his power is at present restrained by the presence of the Holy Ghost down here—next, that when this curb is removed, his boldness in wickedness and his dominion over the world will for a time be unchecked, and he will dispose of the dominion of the world, giving to the beast “his power, and his seat, and great authority” (Rev. xiii. 2). This will last but a short time, and will end in his own discomfiture and captivity. But until that time, however Satan’s dominion may be restrained, Scripture owns him as being, in fact, the god and the prince of this world, the real instigating power in the hearts of men, the one in obedience to whose direction man’s schemes are organised and his affairs governed. True, this is only by suffrance—but whose suffrance? The suffrance of God. And is it not a deeply solemn and significant fact that God should be withholding the kingdom of the world from His Son, and allowing it to be usurped by Satan? Is it not enough to warn every believer from taking part in the world’s affairs, or seeking the world’s approval and support? What is God opposing to the power of Satan? Simply the presence of His Spirit as the witness for Christ. Do Christians think that they know better? Do they suppose that by taking a different course, by setting the world to improve the world, by appealing to its suffrages to set things straight, they can really alter its character or deliver it from Satan’s dominion under which God has left it? Is it wiser—is it more reverent

—to attempt that which God is not concerned in, that which His Word tells can only end in fearful failure ; or to walk in fellowship with Him, holding aloof from the world and its affairs, and in the power of the Spirit, setting forth the Christ in whom alone deliverance from the world and its judgment is to be found—gathering a people out of the world to the One whom God has set at His own right hand in glory, and by whom in His time the sceptre of the world will be righteously wielded, and the blessing of the world surely accomplished ?

But did not Jesus, it may be asked, go about doing good ? And may not the possession of political power, and interference in the world's concerns, be the means of doing great good ? This, however, is man's reasoning, and the place of a believer is not to reason, but to obey. Looked at broadly, in the light of God's truth, a Christian cannot do good by political action, for the end to which everything is working is plainly taught in the Word, and that end is not good, but awfully bad. Leaving, however, the domain of argument, and falling back on Scripture, what does the Word teach us ? Undoubtedly it tells us that Jesus went about doing good, and it tells us, too, that believers are placed here for the same object for which He was here—"As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John xvii. 18). How, then, did Jesus do good ? Was it by the exercise of political power ? Was it by worldly combinations and societies ? Was it by seeking

popular support ? Himself the only One who had a right to rule, or whose rule could bring blessing, He absolutely declined to receive power. Offered by the devil, He at once detected and denounced the deceiver. Asked to take the place of an arbiter, he replied, "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you ?" (Luke xii. 14). Perceiving that the people "would come, and take Him by force to make Him a king, He departed again into a mountain Himself alone" (John vi. 15). In private none ever laboured as He to do good. But the time for public and governmental blessing to the earth had not yet come. The sceptre was not yet put into His hands by the only One who had a right to bestow it, and He would receive it from no other. If the sceptre was not given by His Father, it must be taken either from the "god of this world," or from man, and from neither of these would He accept it. In what respect are things altered ? Has God yet changed His mode of dealing with the world ? Can the Christian receive power from hands from which Christ refused it ? Or will God give it to the fellow-heirs, while He is yet withholding it from the One whom He has made heir of all things ?

But are not the powers that be ordained of God ? Unquestionably they are. Civil government is a direct trust from God, and the ruler is responsible to God for the way in which he exercises it. The maintenance of peace and order is according to God's institution, and therefore Christians are commanded not

only to render obedience, but to yield suitable homage, and to remember those charged with authority in their prayers. But though instituted by God, it is left to man, to the world, and a world which lies in the wicked one, to administer. The time when it can be administered according to God's plans, the time when it will be used to work out God's purposes of blessing to the earth, has not yet arrived, and will not arrive until the throne of Christ is established in Zion. The use which man is making of this institution is to bring about the fearful state of things preceding the judgments executed by Christ, and surely no Christian would wish to have any hand in forwarding this gloomy catastrophe.

It is most significant, then, that while the New Testament Scriptures give ample directions for the behaviour of the husband to the wife and the wife to the husband, of the children to the parent and the parent to the children, of the servant to the master and the master to the servant, and while they also lay down the conduct proper from a subject to the powers that be, they give no directions whatever as to the way of executing political trust. A Christian under authority has ample directions how to act. A Christian wielding political powers has no directions at all. Why this omission ? True, Christians at the time when the New Testament was written, were not in a state to exercise political power ; but if God had meant them to be placed in this position of responsibility, would He have withheld instructions as to the way in



which they were to fill it ? Was He so shortsighted that He omitted to provide for a state of things which would receive His sanction ; or did He expressly withhold all directions, because the position was one to which His sanction could not be given ? The character of believers as “not of the world,” as associated with Christ in His “patience,” as fellow-heirs with Him whom God has not yet put in possession of the inheritance, fully explains the omission—and nothing else can. Strange, indeed, if He had authorised and instructed the fellow-heirs of Christ to take part in bringing about that state of things which they will shortly be associated with Christ in judging and overturning !

And this is all the more striking from the contrast which it presents with the Old Testament teaching. There God speaks to a people, who, instead of being outside the world, are expressly promised the most favoured position, and the most abundant blessing in the world. For their guidance the fullest political and legal directions are provided. What treatment to give to captured cities, what exemptions to make from military service, what number of witnesses to require in criminal trials, what courts to establish for disputed questions, what punishments to inflict for particular offences, these and other kindred matters are laid down with a precision suited to the worldly character of the subject with which they deal. As might be expected, where the righteous regulation of society was the object, strict assertion of right is



the pervading principle ; “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” fairly summarises its spirit. Indeed, such must be the spirit of any code for the equitable government of man on the earth.

But is this the code laid down for the Christian to follow? No, the Christian is “not of the world,” and the directions given him are suited to his heavenly character and his association with the “patience” of Christ. He is a follower of Him who “was brought as a lamb to the slaughter,” “who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.” How, then, is the believer to act? In just the same way. “If, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God; for even *hereunto were ye called*, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow His steps” (1 Pet. ii. 20-23). Such, too, are our Lord’s own directions. Instead of demanding “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,” as the Israelite was to do, His instructions are—“Resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain” (Matt. v. 39-41).

And this, though strongly put, is no figure of speech. Paul exclaims, as though the idea were shocking to entertain—“Dare any of you, having a matter against

another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?" It is incredible that "brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now, therefore, there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather *take wrong*? Why do ye not rather *suffer yourselves to be defrauded*" (1 Cor. vi. 1-7)? Imagine such language addressed to a Jew! It is absolutely subversive of the whole principle on which the institutions of his state were founded—absolutely ruinous to any scheme of righteous government on earth. Why, then, is it urged, as an almost self-evident principle, on the believer? Because the believer is not of the world. He belongs to Christ. True, he will judge the world, and judge angels, but this will be with Christ; and if Christ waits for this time, so must he. He is not even to assert his rights now, but is called to suffer wrong as Christ did; not to render "evil for evil, or railing for railing, but, contrariwise, blessing"—not to avenge himself, "but rather give place unto wrath" (1 Peter iii. 9; Rom. xii. 19). Is it not a sad departure from the lofty position and heavenly association into which the believer is called, for him to step down to regulate the affairs of a world where Christ has no place, and where Satan reigns as prince and god? "Our politics," says the Apostle—for that is the true meaning of the word—"are *in heaven*, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. iii. 20).

On the night of their deliverance from Egypt, the

Israelites were told to keep the passover beneath the shelter of the blood-sprinkled lintel. "And thus shall ye eat it : with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand" (Ex. xii. 11). Could a people thus waiting for the call to depart give their time and attention to the affairs of Egypt? Had they not heard that judgment was coming? Did they not believe what the Lord had said—"For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the first-born of the land of Egypt, both man and beast, and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord" (ver. 12)? Is our position less solemn, less momentous? Are the commands to us less stringent? Is the judgment hanging over the world less real, less awful, or less certain? The commands are identical. To the faithful servants He says—"Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord" (Luke xii. 35, 36). The threatened judgment on the unfaithful and on the world is identical too—"If, therefore, thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee" (Rev. iii. 3). If it would have been unnatural for an Israelite to busy himself on that fatal night with the concerns of the land over which the arm of the destroyer was already upraised, is it less a departure from our true place, is it less inconsistent with our heavenly calling, for us to be occupying ourselves about the affairs of a world in which we are but strangers and sojourners,—

a world from which we may at any moment be summoned to depart—a world over which the black clouds of impending judgment are already hanging ?

No wonder that the Apostle should begin his practical exhortation to the Romans—"Be not conformed to this world" (Rom. xii. 2). The word, indeed, is age, but "this age," as we have seen, means the world during the present order of things, in contrast with "the age to come," the period of Christ's blessed reign. While, therefore, it is important to distinguish between "the end of this age," and "the end of the world"—two very different epochs—it is not necessary to distinguish between the world and "the age," when used to describe the state of things in which we now live. Thus employed, the word *kosmos*, generally found in John, is practically synonymous with the word *aiōn* generally found in the writings of Paul. Why, then, is the Christian not to be conformed to the world ? For two reasons ; first, because it is an evil world from which Jesus died that He might set us free—"who gave Himself for our sins, *that He might deliver us from this present evil world*, according to the will of our God and Father" (Gal. i. 4) ; and next, because, being associated with Jesus in death and resurrection, our relationships with this world are broken, and the ground of our glorying now is "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world" (Gal. vi. 14). What was it that distinguished the past life of the Ephesian be-

lievers from their present life? “In time past ye walked *according to the course of this world*, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph. ii. 2). Surely there is something most solemn and instructive in the way in which conformity to the world is here set side by side with conformity to the will of Satan. Yet not more solemn, or full of deeper significance, than the description of those “whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—*who mind earthly things*” (Phil. iii. 19). The believer is “risen with Christ,” and to him, therefore, the exhortation is addressed—“Set your affection on things above, *not on things on the earth*” (Col. iii. 2).

Such, then, is the character of the world as gathered from the writings of Paul. It is a thing to which we are not to be conformed; a thing from which Christ died to deliver us; a thing to which we are crucified, and which is crucified to us; a thing in the ways of which the godless walk; a thing by the minding of which those are characterised “whose end is destruction;” a thing from which our affections are to be transferred that they may be set on things above. In the apostle to whom it was given in special manner to develop the truth of the Church, this teaching is peculiarly striking, but it is not by Paul alone that the world is held out as unsuited for the Christian. “Ye adulterers and adulteresses,” asks James, addressing himself to those who were holding commerce with the



world, "know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God" (James iv. 4). And yet, what are Christians doing, on all hands, but bidding for popularity, courting the applause of the multitude, seeking to be the friends of the world where their Master received nothing but a cross? "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," writes the beloved disciple. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For *all* that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John ii. 15, 16). Alas! what a commentary on this Divine lesson to behold Christians rushing with all the eagerness of partisans into the strife of worldly factions, grasping at the riches and the pleasures, the splendours and the emoluments, the powers and the applause, of a sin-stricken, Satan-governed, death-doomed world, from whose defilement they are told to keep themselves unspotted, and from whose friendship they are bidden to hold themselves aloof!

And why is this? Simply because Christians have lost the sense of the heavenly nature of their calling. Believing that God is going to improve the world, they suppose themselves set here to improve it, instead of to come out of it. They think they can make it better by mingling with it, instead of seeing that the only blessing they can confer upon it is to separate from it, and warn it of the wrath to come.



They yoke themselves unequally with unbelievers to drag along the car of "modern progress," the Jugger-naut of our day, forgetting that the world which is harnessed with them is lying in the wicked one, and that there can be no fellowship between righteousness and unrighteousness, no communion between light and darkness, no concord between Christ and Belial. (2 Cor. vi. 14, 15.) Alas ! if they only knew that this modern progress was leading to all the horrors and judgments which are even now ready to burst like a tempest upon the world. They quote such texts as our Lord's entreaty—"I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John xvii. 15)—as though this meant that they might go hand in hand with the world, provided they avoided certain gross wickedness ; as though the very next verse did not expressly declare that "they are not of the world ;" as though the whole teaching of the New Testament did not show the world to be evil and at enmity with Christ ; and as though it were not obvious that a people who did not belong to the world, but were left in it, would be most effectually preserved from its evil by avoiding its associations, separating from its pursuits, and refusing its friendships.

Let us take the text with its neighbouring verses, and see how the whole passage reads. "And now," says our Lord, "come I to Thee, and these things I speak in the world that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Thy word ;

and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Thy truth ; Thy word is truth. As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world " (John xvii. 13-18). Our relationship with the world, then, is the same as Christ's is now. We are as much separated from it in character as He is. We are, indeed, left in it, just as He was in it. But as He did not seek by human efforts, by political organisations, by philanthropic societies, by any fleshly or worldly means, to make it better, so that is not our object. He came to testify of the Father, to manifest the Father ; and as He witnessed for the One who sent Him, so we are to witness for the One who has sent us. He has pronounced the flesh to be hopelessly bad, and never sets the flesh to cure the flesh. The attempt to do so only shows ignorance of God's truth and God's manner of working, only proves that we have not yet learnt what man is, and that in us, that is in our flesh, there dwells no good thing. True, we may make the world more comfortable ; we may have our Jubals to " handle the harp and organ," our Tubal-Cains, instructors " of every artificer in brass and iron ;" we may eat and drink, buy and sell, plant and build ; but what is the end of it all ? Sudden destruction ! Is this the sort of thing to occupy the

heart of a Christian who is bidden to wait for the coming of his Lord? Is there not something unspeakably melancholy in the stories one has read of condemned criminals dressing themselves out in the full height of the fashion to go forth to the scaffold? And is there not something incomparably more ghastly and appalling in the spectacle of a world tricking itself out in all the finery of modern ideas, the intellectualities, the refinements, the elevating pursuits and objects by which it seeks to make to itself a name, and build a tower whose top shall reach to heaven, when all the while the lightnings of God's judgment are ready to descend, and leave it a blackened mass of ruin and desolation?

And why have we gone thus at length into the teaching of Scripture upon this point? Simply to show that the Church is, not figuratively, but literally, a thing separate from and outside the world. The directions given to individual Christians correspond in every respect with the inferences we should have drawn from the character of the Church as traced in previous chapters, and bring out in clearer colours the heavenly character of our present calling. That this heavenly character should be exhibited *in* the world and *to* the world, is what God requires at our hands; it is what is involved in walking worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called. But if these are shown forth according to Christ's example, what will be the result? Because these virtues “are not of the world,” the world will hate us. There is the

widest possible difference between exhibiting the patience, gentleness, love, mercy, and self-sacrifice of Christ, and striving, however laboriously, to improve, elevate, and benefit mankind. The one excites the world's hatred; the other wins its applause. The one brings real blessing to man by setting Christ before him; the other puffs him up with the idea of self-improvement, and blinds his eyes to his true condition in God's sight. The one glorifies God by making Him the sole object before the heart; the other runs in opposition to His thoughts, making man's blessing the object, at a time when Christ, the only source of blessing, has separated Himself from the world, and is calling people to share His separation. The one looks the judgment fairly in the face, and points man to the only refuge in which he can be sheltered from the storm; the other shuts its eyes to the signs of the time, stops its ears to the mutterings of the approaching tempest, and bids man go on with his own schemes, his own improvements, his own inventions, as though the coming wrath were nothing but an idle tale.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE CHURCH ON EARTH—ITS UNITY.

THOUGH the Church is heavenly in calling, character, and connection, it is outwardly still in the world, and, as thus placed, needs special guidance and keeping. For this our Lord prays—"And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be ONE, as We are" (John xvii. 11). The perfection of the Church as the body of Christ we have already seen; as also how its heavenly character defines the walk suited to the believer. But the believer has not only to walk as an individual; he is a member of Christ, and this, besides putting him outside the world, puts him inside the assembly. He has duties and relationships in connection with his fellow members, and the whole body of believers have a corporate character to sustain in the world. The Church has its Divine order, its Divine principles of government, and our inquiry now is what the Word of God teaches us on this subject.

But here it may be asked—Is there any order laid



down in Scripture? Is not the matter left to the choice and judgment of individuals, according to the varying character of their own minds? May it not be regulated on principles of convenience or expediency, differing in different countries, different ages, and different circumstances? To this I would reply that such a mode of leaving the Church would be in accordance neither with God's general principle of action, nor with His special care of the assembly. It is not in accordance with God's general principle of action to leave anything to be settled by man's wisdom. "The world by wisdom knew not God." The effect of preaching even the truth of God with "wisdom of words" is that "the cross of Christ" is "made of none effect." To those who seek after wisdom, Christ crucified is only "foolishness." In a word, man's wisdom is set completely on one side by the cross, and the effect of bringing in man's thoughts and self-will in the things of God has always been most disastrous. When David attempted to fetch up the ark to Jerusalem in his own way instead of God's way, the result was the "breach of Uzzah." He had taken counsel with his captains instead of the Lord, and though he was doing a right thing, he found how bitter were the fruits of following man's wisdom as to the way in which it was to be done. Man's wisdom cannot be allowed, and can only bring in mischief, when it is exercised in the things of God. God has His own order, and the path of faith is not to reason, but to obey.



And if this is the general principle on which God acts—if it is the necessary consequence of the alienation of the flesh from God, and of His setting aside of the old man by the cross—how unworthy would it have been of God to act on a different principle with respect to the Church. As a heavenly people they are the peculiar object of His delight; but as a heavenly people placed here on the earth, they stand in special need of guidance how to conduct themselves in a scene where they are only strangers and pilgrims. Would God, then, put His own chosen heavenly people in the midst of a hostile world, without laying down the principles which should regulate their collective action? If the assembly, as seen in Christ, is the display of God's manifold wisdom "unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places," was the assembly, as seen on earth, not meant to exhibit God's wisdom also? Is it merely individually that we are to witness for Christ? Is the wonderful work wrought at Pentecost, by which all believers were baptized into one body, to be wholly invisible to the world—wholly useless in the way of testimony? God has given His own Word to direct our individual walk—"Sanctify them through Thy truth, Thy word is truth" (John xvii. 17). Has He left us without guide, then, as to the order suitable for His assembly? Has He handed over to that wisdom which knew not God, the completion of the work which He began in His own wisdom? Surely the very thought is dishonouring to His name! To have shaped us into

the most wondrous union ever known, making us the very body and bride of Christ in heaven, and then to have abandoned us to our own guidance, leaving us to form ourselves in all sorts of associations according to our own "views" or "tastes," instead of giving us a Divine pattern and Divine rules to govern all our ways—surely this is not the mode in which our God deals with His children !

True, He has given us the Spirit ; but does the Spirit ever act independently of the Word ? In guiding individual conduct, the Spirit acts by unfolding the Word to the understanding, and applying it to the conscience. The Word is the sole standard, and any conduct which does not conform to the Word is, at once, by the spiritually minded, judged as the working of the flesh, and not of the Holy Ghost. If this is the standard for individual conduct, is it less so for the action of the assembly ? Does not the Holy Ghost guide there in the same way, and if rules and appointments are made without the authority of the Word, should not the spiritually minded set these down also as the working of the natural heart, instead of receiving them as the acts of the Spirit of God ? It is impossible that a dozen different modes of Church government and order can all be in accordance with the Word. How, then, can it be said that they are the work of the Spirit of God ? And if not, how can the Spirit's guidance be looked for in carrying them out ? Not that I question for a moment the blessing of God on the faithful preaching of His truth

in any system. But this grace does not sanction the system which is not according to His Word, or lessen the responsibility of believers with respect to their connection with such a system. Either God has laid down an order for His assembly, or He has left it to man's will to do so. If He has laid down an order, it is clearly obligatory upon all, and every departure from that order is an act of disobedience. If He has left the order to the will and wisdom of man, what but confusion and division could possibly ensue?

We shall see, as we look into the Scriptures, that God, instead of leaving the government of the assembly to the wisdom of man, has emphatically repudiated and excluded any such intrusion; and that He has Himself undertaken to legislate for that Church, which is the dearest object to His heart, the brightest display of His wisdom, and the chosen bride of His beloved Son. What, then, is His Divine and perfect order? The conduct enjoined upon the individual saint corresponds with the heavenly nature of his calling. In like manner the Church on earth is to be, as it were, the mirror of God's thoughts with respect to it. Now the Church, when viewed according to the mind of God, is a unity, a single body—the body of Christ—formed, and connected with its living Head, by the Holy Ghost sent down to abide here on earth. Thus formed into oneness in and with Christ, it is separate from the world, is heavenly in its character, and is to have its place down here, as a witness for an absent Christ, and as waiting His

return to take it to glory. Its gatherings are to be in the name of Jesus only, and the smallest number thus gathered have His presence and His administrative power in their midst. Such is the Church, according to God's institution, and all the directions for its government are in Divine harmony with this general character.

The first great principle is that it is a unity, the body of Christ. This, no doubt, is a figure, but it is one which the Holy Ghost constantly employs, and that to show the union of members with one another as well as with Christ, their dependence upon one another as well as upon Christ. If the Church is the body of Christ, believers are "one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. xii. 5). Therefore, "the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you" (1 Cor. xii. 21). Nay, more, if "one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (ver. 26). The body, therefore, though a figure, is not a mere fugitive metaphor, true to a certain point, and then failing in its application. It is a figure constantly recurring, and used to show the closest possible union among believers. Since, however, the Church is one body, the body of Christ, part of the testimony which it is called upon to bear is the manifestation of this oneness on earth. This much we may safely infer, for the Church down here, as instituted by God, was the reflection to the world of

what it was in His own thoughts, and man's responsibility was to keep it such. The Holy Ghost, however, has not left us to inferences. Knowing the immense importance of the point, and the effort which Satan would make to divert man from God's thoughts, He has given us the clearest instructions on the matter.

Thus Jesus prays the Father—"Keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be ONE, as We are" (John xvii. 11). Here oneness is asked, and a most blessed character of oneness—a transcript of that transcendent oneness of the Father and the Son. The oneness of nature is, indeed, a depth which man's intellect can never fathom, but the oneness of purpose and of love has been divinely manifested. This oneness, then, at least, believers are to exhibit to the world. True, the Lord is not here speaking of the Church; but He is speaking of those whom the Holy Ghost was just about to form into the Church; and this oneness was to be exhibited in those who constituted the Church. The baptism of the Holy Ghost surely could not weaken the obligation, or lower the character, of the oneness here prayed for.

It may be objected, however, that Jesus speaks only of the apostles; also that this oneness was not to be outward and visible, but only in spirit, as seen by God. Let us look, then, at another text. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may



be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And the glory which Thou gavest Me, I have given them, that they may be one even as We are one. I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one" (John xvii. 20-23). Here Jesus prays for all them "which shall believe on Me through their word." Surely each believer will eagerly claim his part in this. But if all believers are included, the Lord's request for them all is that they may be made one even as He Himself was one with the Father. And so far was this oneness from being invisible to the world, that it was to be the evidence to the world of the Father's having sent the Son. If God meant it to be a testimony to the world, He must have meant it to be something which the world could see. If, therefore, the oneness of believers is not visible to the world, the Church has failed in its testimony. There may be abundant *individual* testimony that the Father has sent the Son; but the testimony here named, the testimony which was to be borne by the manifest oneness of believers, cannot come from a divided Church.

No doubt there is a wide difference between unity and uniformity; for the uniformity which does not spring out of unity is a mere lifeless pretence. No doubt, too, the unity here spoken of is unity of spirit. But how will unity of spirit show itself? In endless divisions? In splitting into innumerable fragments? In presenting to the world the most perfect possible



exhibition of want of unity? Granted that the so-called Church which boasts loudest of unity has nothing better than a hollow and soulless uniformity. Does it follow, because a counterfeit uniformity, which is not of God, has once existed, that a true uniformity, the fruit of unity of spirit, was not God's purpose? Real unity of spirit would produce uniformity, and in the Church, as set up by God, we find both. The figures used to describe this oneness, show its real character. Believers were to be one even as the Father and the Son are one. Could anything be conceived more perfect, both as to its inward character and as to its outward manifestation? Such, then, is the oneness which should bind together believers, and bear testimony, here in the world, to the Father's having sent the Son. Will anybody say that modern Christendom, or the Church, presents such a testimony? But in another figure believers are said to be one body. If the first presents the most perfect picture of oneness to the heart, this presents the most perfect image to the senses. A body cut in pieces may still be one to the mind of the anatomist; but it is not one to the eye of the world. God doubtless discerns amongst the scattered members the oneness of the body of Christ, but to the world they are only disjointed limbs, with no union subsisting among them. Such, assuredly, was not the thought of God.

But whence comes this disruption of outward, visible unity? The differences are on points of doctrine, discipline, organisation, and other similar

matters. It may be said that on such subjects there must always be differences, from the various structure of the human mind. No doubt, if man's will and judgment are allowed to work at all, such differences must exist. But God opens no door for man's thoughts to enter. He has not left these matters to be settled by the human mind. Had the Church been faithful, Christ's presence in its midst would have decided all questions. With the Word as the infallible guide, and the Holy Ghost as the infallible interpreter, no diversity of judgment could have manifested itself. What brought in difference of judgment was want of subjection to God's thoughts. Man put his own wisdom in the place of God's. The Spirit's guidance was no longer sufficient for him, and he began exercising his own judgment, dragging in worldly philosophy, choosing teachers according to his own tastes, and forming schools of doctrine to suit his own inclinations.

No doubt this arises from the constitution of man's nature. But does this excuse it? To the spiritual eye, it only proves more conclusively how evil it is. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." To say, then, that it is natural, is only to say that it is contrary to God's mind. Does Scripture palliate these divisions because they are natural? Nay, this is just the ground on which it condemns them. "And I, brethren," writes the apostle, "could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I

have fed you with milk, and not with meat ; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal ; for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal and walk as men ? For while one saith, I am of Paul ; and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal ?" (1 Cor. iii. 1-4). Here, then, the Holy Ghost clearly teaches that sects and divisions are not of God, but of man, that they are the results of unspirituality, carnality, and walking as men. Yet Christians defend them as the result of man's nature. "We are only walking as men," they say. "If you are walking as men," replies the apostle, "you are carnal, and I cannot speak to you as spiritual." What a fearful chasm between the thoughts of Christians and the thoughts of Christ !

How does the apostle exhort them ? Does he say — "These things are inevitable ; all men cannot see eye to eye ; to run everybody into the same mould would destroy originality, create a dull uniformity, and sap the emulation necessary to religious growth and fervour ?" Alas ! such reasoning is the working of the natural heart, which, putting away God's Word as the infallible guide, and the Holy Ghost as the infallible interpreter, sets up human thoughts and speculations in their place. How different the language of the apostle. "The weapons of our warfare," he says, "are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations (or reasonings) and every

high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. x. 4, 5). Man's reasonings, instead of being allowed, are the very things which the weapons of Paul's warfare were to overthrow. Instead of the reasonings of the natural heart, he would bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And what does this obedience require? "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be *no divisions* among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. i. 10). Is this impracticable? Why, then, does the Holy Ghost demand it? If man's will has a place, then it is impracticable, but not if every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

The apostle, however, goes further, and characterises these divisions in language which should make the believer's ears to tingle. "It hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. *Is Christ divided?* Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. i. 11-13). Now let us consider for a moment what it is that the apostle is here dealing with. It was a tendency among the Corinthian saints to form themselves into different schools of doctrine according

to their preference for particular teachers. Up to this time it had created no schism in the eyes of the world. One party had not declined to meet at the Lord's table with the other, and gone off to form a separate gathering. In a word, the tendency had not yet produced any of the fruit which is so plentiful in our days, and if evil, it was evil in a much milder form than that with which we are familiar. But does this cause the apostle to speak lightly of it? Does it make him describe it in gentle terms? Mark his solemn language. "Is Christ divided?" he asks; "Was Paul crucified for you?" The meaning of this is, that as the Church is the body of Christ, the division of the Church, even in the mild form it had then taken, was the division of Christ Himself. So completely was the Church down here to be the pattern of God's thoughts, that to one who was really in the mind of God, the idea of its division was as monstrous as the idea of a divided Christ. Such was the Church as established by God; such was His judgment of those divisions which man now either glories in as a proof of his own freedom, or defends as the inevitable, and therefore allowable, result of the working of his natural mind!

It may be said that all sects meet in the name of Christ; that the other titles by which they distinguish themselves do not supersede the name of Christ, but are only added to it; and that nobody proposes in taking a badge, to put that badge on an equality with the common badge of all believers, faith in the



person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. I cheerfully admit the truth of such a statement, but in this respect what difference is there between the various sects of Christendom and the Corinthians? Whatever difference there is places the Corinthians in the better light. They still maintained outward oneness. They had their favourite teachers and doctrines, but never dreamed of putting these teachers up as against Christ. All they did was to be occupied with the teachers and doctrines so as to prevent their oneness in Christ having full and perfect expression. Will anybody venture to say that the dishonour done to Christ by their conduct would have been removed if, instead of having their preferences, they had broken into various sects, met in different places, on conflicting principles, and shown to the whole world, not the picture of oneness which the apostle demands, but the picture of division and dispersion which we see in modern Christendom? Is it not manifest that such a spectacle would have been infinitely worse than that which the apostle here mourns over? Is it not certain that the strong language in which he condemns the divisions that had already shown themselves, would have been intensified a thousand-fold could he have foreseen the present state of things? The unity of believers was to show to the world Christ's mission from the Father and His oneness with the Church. The division of believers shows the contrary of all this. It exhibits, not the truth of God, but the lie of man. Oh, that Christians would ponder over those



solemn words, "Is Christ divided?" and thus learn to judge, in the light of God's thoughts, the condition of affairs in which they now find so much cause for congratulation.

Hence everything that indicated the slightest division is condemned. That indifference to God's Word, now called "charity" and "broadness," which says—"you think your way and I mine"—was unknown to Paul. He must have *every* thought in captivity to the obedience of Christ. To the world's philosophy and reasonings he opposes the cross. "If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances . . . after the commandments and doctrines of men?" (Col. ii. 20-22). Not that he expected equal intelligence in all, but there is no hint that those with different measures of intelligence were to separate from one another. "Him that is weak in the faith," he says, "receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations" (Rom. xiv. 1), or again—"Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing" (Phil. iii. 16).

Indeed in one who saw in the divisions of believers the division of Christ, how could even the shadow of sectarianism fail to create alarm? No wonder he should write—"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord

Jesus Christ, but their own belly" (Rom. xvi. 17, 18). Such is the Lord's estimate of the origin of sects. Yet modern Christendom actually glories in them as a proof of intellectual life! How different the apostle's prayer—"Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus, that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. xv. 5, 6). It is not divided worship that God seeks any more than a divided Christ.

Nay, the very purpose for which God has "set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him,"—the very reason for which He "hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked,"—is "that there should be no schism in the body" (1 Cor. xii. 18-25). In the Lord's supper, the touching memorial left behind Him by Christ of His dying love, the same oneness is beautifully set forth—"For we, being many, are one bread (or loaf) and one body; for we are all partakers of that one loaf" (1 Cor. x. 17).

How earnestly the appeal is over and over again repeated to oneness of heart and mind. "Be perfect," says the apostle to the Corinthians, "be of good comfort, *be of one mind*, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Cor. xiii. 11). He entreats the Ephesians to walk in love, "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," and adds, "there is one body and one Spirit,

even as ye are called in one hope of your calling ; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all " (Eph. iv. 3-6). And multitudes of modern believers say, that the best means of thus keeping the unity of the Spirit, of showing forth in ourselves this sevenfold oneness into which we are called, is by dividing into as many sects as the self-will and uncontrolled judgment of man can devise ! In like manner the gifts bestowed by our ascended Christ are distributed " for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come, *in the unity of the faith*, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ " (ver. 12, 13). Wherever we look, the oneness which belongs to the Church in the mind of God is expected to find its manifestation here on earth.

The Philippians are exhorted to be " like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind " (Phil. ii. 2) ; and two leading persons are specially addressed—" I beseech Euodias and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord " (iv. 2). Addressing the Colossians, he says, " Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body " (Col. iii. 15). Nowhere do we find the slightest trace of that modern philosophy which defends sects as securing variety in unity, which says, " Let men have their own thoughts on all matters but the great essential truths of salva-

tion.” Sects are utterly condemned as the division of Christ, *every* thought is to be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Divisions are set down to carnality, disobedience, self-will. Besides, non-essential truths are a human invention, most dishonouring to God. What do men mean by the word? Truths not necessary to their own salvation. They may be most clearly taught in the Word, most blessed unfoldings of God’s glory and grace,—but why should we care for them, if we can get to heaven without them? Alas, that such thoughts should enter the minds of God’s children! No truth which God has revealed is non-essential, none will be felt to be non-essential by those who care for His glory.

Sects, then, are entirely contrary to God’s Word. Does it make matters any better that they are of centuries standing? “God is not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man that He should repent.” What He has once declared evil cannot become good by long continuance. If the formation of sects was an act of disobedience and disorder, of carnality and wilfulness, their perpetuation cannot be exactly the opposite. What length of time converts disobedience into obedience? disorder into order? carnality into spirituality? or wilfulness into subjection? Granted that the guilt of those who inherit the ruin is less than that of those who caused it, still the character of the thing itself is unchanged. How the children of God are called upon to act when they find themselves encumbered with this fatal inheritance, I

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shall ask presently. What I want to point out now is, that it is a fatal inheritance—that the state of things around us is absolutely contradictory and dishonouring to the Word of God—and that no length of standing, above all no arguments of expediency or necessity, can change the character, or lighten the condemnation, which the Holy Ghost has stamped upon it. If I find myself involved in that which God condemns, I am bound to search His word to learn how I can escape from it, and I am entitled to reckon with the most absolute confidence that He has provided such a way for those who faithfully seek it.

## CHAPTER VI.

### LOCAL ASSEMBLIES—OFFICES—GIFTS—WORSHIP.

THE Church on earth, as instituted by God, displayed the unity of the Church as the body of Christ. But when the truth became widely diffused, how was this unity to be maintained? Was it then to become a mere imaginary unity, so far at least as outward manifestation was concerned, or was it to be preserved by a system of organised government? Let us see what light the Word throws on this subject.

I. In each city the believers formed one Church. Thus there was “the Church of God which is at Corinth,” and the “Church of the Thessalonians,” each a single assembly of all the believers in its own city, a sample, so to speak, of the oneness of Christ in that place, and responsible for maintaining that oneness visibly to the world. The promise of Christ’s presence held good in each of these local gatherings. If but two or three believers were assembled in His name, He was in their midst. If the city were large, and the believers numerous, there might be several *places* of meeting, but those assembling at these dif-



ferent places would all constitute one Church. The numerous places would no more infringe the Scripture principle of the oneness of the local assembly than the various local assemblies in different cities infringed the principle of the oneness of the body.

The local assembly, then, in each city was one. We read of the "*Churches* of Galatia," for Galatia was a province with several cities ; but we never read of the *Churches* at Ephesus or at Philadelphia, for in each of these cities, the believers formed only one Church. If in any city they had split into sects, meeting on different principles, what would have been the local testimony to the oneness of Christ? None ; but on the contrary, a false testimony—a testimony to a divided Christ. In that city the Church, as Christ's body, would have had no representative. There would have been no assembly meeting in His name. Had He been the one centre, all would have met together. Instead of Him, then, as the focus, each sect must have had its own ground of separate gathering, which prevented it meeting with the rest. None of these assemblies, therefore, could have claimed the promise of His presence in its midst. No doubt, God in His grace might have blessed individual souls in spite of the disorder. But let us put far from us the unworthy thought that God's grace justifies a departure from His Word.

Was, then, each local assembly independent of the rest, or was there any organisation to maintain the oneness of action and discipline? As regards binding

and loosing, that is, receiving into fellowship and exercising discipline, each assembly acted in its own sphere. Thus when some one was guilty of immorality at Corinth, the apostle directs, "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ), to deliver such an one unto Satan" (1 Cor. v. 4, 5). The assembly was to act, and it acted "with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ," in whose name it was gathered, and whose presence gave it this authority. Had it been a mere voluntary association of believers, agreeing together in certain principles of Church government or doctrine, and separated from others by this barrier, it could not have exercised this power, for it could not have had Christ's presence. Such an assembly would have had no more scriptural authority to bind and loose than a number of members of Parliament voluntarily gathered in a public meeting have to exact laws.

But though each assembly meeting in Christ's name had authority to bind and loose, this had a much wider effect than putting out, or receiving into, that particular gathering. As each assembly was only the localised expression of the whole body, so its action was only the localised expression of the action of the whole body. Scripture never speaks of a person as a member of *a* Church. Though he was received by a local assembly, he was received, not as a member of that assembly, but as a member of the body of Christ. So, if one

were put away, it was from participation in the privileges, not of a particular gathering, but of the Church of God. It was Christ's own administrative act, as present in the assembly, and no assembly could have received with Christ's sanction one whom Christ had put away. Thus, though outwardly the act only of a local assembly, it was really Christ's acting in the assembly, and became, therefore, the judgment of the whole Church. All were responsible for it, and this responsibility did not cease, if in any case the local assembly failed to act. If a local assembly would not put away one who, according to Christ's mind, ought to be put away, it would not only fail in subjection, but would share the offender's guilt. The little leaven, not having been purged out, would have leavened the whole local assembly, and if it spread, the whole Church would be corrupted. Other assemblies, therefore, must not only refuse the person who ought to have been put away, but must refuse those who, by neglecting to put him away, resisted Christ's authority and shared the offender's guilt. To urge love as a reason for not doing this, would be a mistake. Christian love has Christ for its first object, and can sanction nothing which dishonours Him or disowns His authority.

There was, then, in the apostolic Church, nothing like "independency." This we see from the "letters of commendation" carried by believers who removed from one city to another. They were not letters of transfer or of dismissal, but letters certifying that the

bearer was a brother or sister in the Lord. Thus, when Phebe left Cenchrea for Rome, Paul, in his letter, described her as "our sister," and commended her to the saints in that city. She was not to be admitted into fellowship at Rome, nor to become a member of the Church at Rome, but being already in fellowship, and a member of the Church of God, the Roman brethren were so to receive her. (Rom. xvi. 1.) But while there was no independency on the one hand, neither was unity maintained by organisation on the other. In each assembly Christ's presence gave authority. He acted as Head, not of the local assembly, but of the whole body, and thus unity of discipline was preserved throughout the Churches. So long as His authority was owned, Divine order and unity must prevail. If they ceased, it could only be because His presence and authority were no more acknowledged.

Would man's organisation mend this? Nay, it would make it a thousand-fold worse. It would be stepping from insubjection to exclusion, from failure to ruin. It would be saying, "Christ's presence cannot maintain unity, let us see whether we cannot find something better." Will God own such a unity? Having made the headship of Christ the binding principle, will He recognise a unity where Christ's headship is set aside, and where the binding principle is man's organisation? No; man's organisation may form a splendid unity in the eyes of the world. But this is not the unity of the Spirit, it is not the body

of Christ, it is not the Church of God. It is of the world, of the flesh; and though all believers were enrolled in it, and none others, it would still lack every feature of God's assembly. It would be but one more vain attempt of man—"Go to, let us build *us* a city and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven, and let us make *us* a name, lest we be scattered abroad on the face of the whole earth." Self, and not God, is the object, and splendid as the structure may be, here, as in the attempt of old, "the name of it is called Babel." Yes; Babylon, this is the name which God's Word gives to the effort to frame a unity by man's organisation, instead of adhering to the Divine unity of the Church of God. For that Church is not man's work. Man's will, man's wisdom, man's government, these are all usurpations of functions which, in the Church of God, belong only to the Holy Ghost and to Christ. Nothing is the body of Christ but that unity which the Spirit forms with Christ as the sole and acknowledged Head.

The Church, then, according to God's order, was one body. The believers in each city were the Church of the place, and when met together in Christ's name, could bind and loose, receive to fellowship or exercise discipline, in His power. In this they acted on behalf of the whole Church, whose oneness of mind was secured by Christ's presence in each assembly. Such was the visible Church as established by God, and in His estimate nothing is *the* Church, nothing



is *a* Church, which does not answer to these conditions.

II. In local assemblies there were generally two kinds of officers—the deacons, and the bishops or elders. They are named by Paul, who writes to “all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Phil. i. 1). No other officers are named in connection with local assemblies. The “gifts” of an ascended Christ, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, are never spoken of as officers, or as connected with local gatherings.

A deacon means a servant, but there is nothing in the name to show the kind of service. In Acts vi. 2, we read that “the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.” Here the serving of tables is contrasted with “the ministry of the word,” the same word, varied in form, being used in both cases. The seven men chosen are not called deacons in this place, but it is probable that such was the name given them; for they were appointed to “serve tables,” so that the title of servant or deacon might easily attach to them; moreover, they were connected with a local assembly, and no other local officer is spoken of at all resembling this, except the deacon; lastly, deacons seem to have been appointed in the same way as these seven.

The apostles said to the believers, “Look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the



Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom WE may appoint over this business." The brethren chose such men, "whom they set before the apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them" (Acts vi. 3-6). Here, then, though the brethren were asked to choose, the appointment was apostolic, by the laying on of hands. We have no other account of how deacons were appointed, but, in writing to Timothy, Paul says—"Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree" (1 Tim. iii. 8-13). These qualifications, though amplified, agree with those named in Acts vi. In both cases they are such as would be sought in persons managing the pecuniary and temporal matters of the assembly. Such full instructions would hardly be given to Timothy, if the appointment were not to be made by himself. No such directions are given in the epistles addressed to Churches, and why should Timothy be told whom to appoint and the Churches not be told, except that the appointment rested with Timothy and not with the Churches? It would seem clear, therefore, that the

deacons were instituted in office either by apostles, or by duly authorised apostolic delegates.

Such was certainly the case with the bishops or elders. That bishops and elders were the same is clear from Paul's language to Titus, whom, he says, he left in Crete, to set things in order, and to "ordain *elders* in every city, as I had appointed thee ; if any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot, or unruly. For a *bishop* must be blameless, as the steward of God" (Tit. i. 5-7). So Peter exhorts the elders to "feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof" [literally, "bishopsing them"], "not by constraint, but willingly" (1 Pet. v. 2). In like manner we read that when Paul from Miletus "sent to Ephesus and called the *elders* of the Church," he beseeches them—"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you *overseers*,"—or "*bishops*," which is the same word in the original (Acts xx. 17, 28).

The elders and bishops, or overseers, then, were the same persons. There were, as the passages quoted in the last paragraph will show, several in each assembly, and their appointment is always either by apostles or apostolic delegates. When Paul and Barnabas, in their first journey, had reached Derbe, they returned through the various cities which they had before visited, comforting and exhorting the brethren, "and when they had ordained them *elders* in every Church, and had prayed with fasting, they

commended them to the Lord on whom they believed " (Acts xiv. 23). This shows, not only that elders were appointed by the apostles, and that there were several of them in each assembly, but also that the assembly was not dependent upon them. The journey described occupied a considerable time, and during this time, till the apostle's return to each city, the Church of that city had no elders, notwithstanding the persecution it endured and the little knowledge it possessed.

Titus was left to appoint elders or bishops in the cities of Crete. Directions were given to Timothy, resembling those to Titus, as to the persons qualified for bishops. They were to be persons such as those named in writing to Titus, but, it is added, "apt to teach." They were also to rule their own houses well, "for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?" They were not to be novices, and were to be of "good report of them which are without" (1 Tim. iii. 2-7). The appointment, therefore, was made by Paul and Barnabas in one case, and by Titus in another, while the directions given indicate that it must have been made by Timothy in the third. Nowhere is there any trace of assemblies choosing elders. Those assemblies which had none waited until they were duly appointed by apostolic authority.

The character and functions of these officers may be gathered from their names. The name "elder" implies age and gravity, and that of "bishop" or overseer indicates that they were to "take care of the Church of God," exercising pastoral supervision over

the younger and less established members. They were, therefore, to be "apt to teach," not necessarily as public expounders of the truth, but "holding fast the faithful word," that they might "be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Tit. i. 9).

An elder or deacon might also be an evangelist or teacher, as Stephen and Philip, two of the first deacons, were. But their office and their gift were entirely distinct things. They were *appointed* to serve tables; they were not appointed, either by the apostles or by the assembly, to go forth as evangelists. The elder or deacon, never, by virtue of his office, exercised gift; nor did the evangelist or teacher ever, by virtue of his gift, hold office. An elder was, indeed, to be "apt to teach," because it was by applying "the faithful word" to the conscience, that his pastoral oversight would chiefly be exercised. But it does not follow that he could teach in the assembly. Everybody knows grave and godly men, deeply taught in Scripture, and most apt, privately, in their application of it, but entirely without gift publicly to edify the Church. It is clear that in the apostle's day, some elders had gift, and some had not, for he says, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, *especially they who labour in the word and doctrine*" (1 Tim. v. 17). Gift and office, then, are entirely distinct. There is no such thing as an office of teacher or preacher; no such thing as an elder or bishop officially teaching or preaching in the assembly; no such thing as an assembly choosing, or

an apostle ordaining, any person to act as teacher or preacher, either in a particular gathering, or in the Church at large. All this is man's invention, and in direct opposition to God's order.

Who, then, it may be inquired, administered the sacraments? Nowhere, in Scripture, is there a hint that baptism or the Lord's Supper were "administered" by any officer whatever, or that their administration was connected with any gift. Paul says that he was sent "not to baptize, but to preach the gospel," and he only baptized two men and one household during his long residence in Corinth (1 Cor. i. 14-17). Peter, when the Holy Ghost fell on the Gentiles in Cornelius's house, "commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (Acts x. 48). Nowhere is baptism administered in connection with gift or office. So, too, of the Lord's Supper. Of course some person must give thanks and break the bread, but where does Scripture describe these as official acts? Man's organisations have consigned the "administration of sacraments" to local officers, and have appointed officers to exercise gift. But God's Word sanctions neither of these practices. It carefully distinguishes between gift and office, and it does not invest either gifted or official persons with any function like that which is now called the "administration of the sacraments." If it be said that such regulations are necessary to order, I reply that the order thus obtained is man's order, and not God's, and that man's order is styled in the Word carnality and self-will. The first lesson of faith is to distrust our own hearts—



to say, as to this matter, and all others, "Let God be true, but every man a liar."

III. But if officers were not appointed to preach and teach, how was the Church to be edified? The nourishing of the body was the work of "the Head, from which all the body, by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God" (Col. ii. 19). What, then, are these joints and bands which minister nourishment and cause increase? In Eph. iv. 8-13, we read that when Christ "ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. . . . And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." These, then, are the joints and bands by which our ascended Head ministers nourishment to His body.

Besides these gifts for edification, there were sign gifts, such as that of tongues, which was "for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not" (1 Cor. xiv. 22). They were early abused, and if perpetuated in a Church in ruins, their abuse might have led to fearful consequences. Having answered their immediate purpose, they were mercifully withdrawn, and no hint is given of their revival. The only signs and miracles spoken of in the future



have a very different origin from those of the early Church.

The gifts for edification were apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Elsewhere it is said that "God hath set some in the Church, first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers;" after which the sign gifts are named. (1 Cor. xii. 28.) The chief gift, then, was that of apostles. They were to testify of Christ's resurrection and to lay the foundation of the Church. The first we see in Peter's language, speaking of the appointment of a new apostle. He was to "be ordained," he said, "to be a witness with us of His resurrection" (Acts i. 22). Paul, too, asks—"Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. ix. 1)? And afterwards, speaking of the witnesses of His resurrection, he says—"And last of all, He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time; for I am the least of the apostles" (1 Cor. xv. 8, 9). The apostles, then, were to be eye-witnesses of Christ's resurrection, an important fact, inasmuch as it shows the office to be temporary in its character, and incapable of revival in after times. Besides being witnesses of Christ's resurrection, they were foundation gifts, the Church being "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone" (Eph. ii. 20). The mystery of the Church was revealed "unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. iii. 5), and they were thus made responsible for laying the

foundation of this wondrous truth. Such were the two great functions of the apostles. When the testimony of those who had seen the risen Christ was finished, when the whole ground-plan of God's truth concerning the Church had been marked out, this gift had done its work, and no renewal of it is shadowed forth in God's Word. We do, indeed, hear of false apostles, for the Ephesian Church is commended because it had "tried them which say they are apostles, and are not," and had "found them liars" (Rev. ii. 2). But there is nothing to indicate that true apostles would again exist. The nature of their functions forbade the thought.

Prophets, like apostles, were entrusted with the mystery, and laid the foundation, of the Church. Some, like Agabus, foretold future events, but this was not their chief characteristic. The most striking feature was the address to the conscience. "If all prophesy," says the apostle, "and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all, and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest" (1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25). In an age when the Scriptures were not completed, moreover, special revelations, probably on other matters, but certainly connected with the "mystery," were made to the prophets; for it is said—"Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge; if anything be *revealed* to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace" (ver. 29, 30). Some of the prophetic gift in reaching the conscience may still

survive, but when God's Word was closed, all that He meant prophetically to reveal was already brought out, and the foundation part of the prophetic gift necessarily disappeared.

But if the foundation gifts lasted only till the foundations were laid, the gifts of evangelists, pastors and teachers were of a more permanent character. The evangelist, or preacher of the gospel, has his sphere of labour in the world. Nevertheless, it is important to observe that he is a gift to the Church, and therefore he has, in proclaiming the gospel, a responsibility connected with the Church. He is not merely given to preach the gospel so that souls may be saved, but he is responsible for bringing the souls consciously and intelligently into their place in God's assembly. The pastor and teacher are different gifts, though they may be combined in the same person. The pastor's work is looking individually after the sheep; the teacher's is giving them public instruction.

It should be clearly seen that these are gifts, not offices; for the whole Church, not for local assemblies. They were bestowed on the Church by an ascended Christ, were responsible to Him for exercising their gift where and as He directed, and either apostolic investiture or choice by an assembly, instead of lending them a legal sanction, would have been a direct infringement of Christ's authority. It is disorder to tie gift to office; it is greater disorder to limit the sphere of its exercise by human regulations; but it is more than disorder, it is dishonour to Christ Himself,

to insist on man's countersign before recognising the validity of His dispositions.

Again, the evangelist, pastor, and teacher are three different gifts. Two may be often, three occasionally, united in one person, but still they are different, and nothing can be more opposed to God's institution than appointing a person who, and who alone, shall be expected to exercise these three rarely combined gifts in some particular place. Indeed, it would be difficult to find one single direction of Scripture which is not completely set aside by the so-called Christian ministry, as now seen in all the sects of the professing Church, from the Roman Catholics to the congregational dissenters. No doubt this is more the result of traditional teaching than of conscious disobedience ; no doubt, too, there are thousands of true servants of Christ in these various systems. But this does not lessen the divergence of these systems from God's Word, nor diminish the obligation of those before whom the truth is presented to come out of them.

There might, of course, be cases where the only person with any gift was compelled by circumstances to reside in a particular neighbourhood, and in such cases the teaching or preaching might be solely in his hands. But this would no more make him the official minister, in the modern sense of the word, than the fact that there was only one tradesman of any sort in a town would make him the official purveyor of his wares to the inhabitants. Teaching and preaching were not things connected with the assembly, nor do

we read of the Church gathering together for these purposes. Doubtless, if a teacher came to a city the brethren would seek to hear him, but he would not exercise his gift in responsibility to the assembly, nor would the meeting of those gathered to hear him be a meeting of the assembly.

IV. For the object of the gathering of the assembly was worship. There might be meetings of brethren for consultation, meetings of believers for prayer, for reading the Scriptures, for hearing gifted teachers and evangelists, but the meeting of the assembly was that held on the first day of the week for remembering the Lord and showing His death. At this meeting the Church acted, "with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ," whether to bind or to loose, but its main object was "the breaking of bread." In instituting the "Lord's Supper," Jesus had broken bread, and this act, recorded in each of the narratives, gave its name to the feast. It is said of the believers immediately after Pentecost, that "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and *in breaking of bread*, and in prayer" (Acts ii. 42). At Troas we read that "upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them" (Acts xx. 7). Paul had been six days at Troas before this, and had doubtless taught and preached, but this is the only meeting of the Church recorded. The language shows that it was not an accident (Paul happening to be there on "com-



munion Sunday”), but that it was the custom to meet together on the first day of the week, for the breaking of bread. So Paul, writing about the collection for poor saints, says—“Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him” (1 Cor. xvi. 2.). At Corinth, where the Lord’s Supper had been converted into a social meal, at which disorder, and even drunkenness, prevailed, the apostle corrects the abuse; and gives directions how the feast should be observed. But throughout he speaks of the meeting for the breaking of bread as the coming “together of the Church,” and assumes that “when ye come together into one place,” the object was to celebrate the Lord’s Supper.

This is no inference from a single passage. We learn the same thing from the language of the apostle in another place. He says, “*In the Church* (or assembly) I had rather speak five words with my understanding, than I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue” (1 Cor. xiv. 19). What does he mean by saying “in the Church?” The context shows that he means the meeting for the breaking of bread, for he asks—referring to the speaking with tongues—“When Thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say ‘Amen,’ at Thy giving of thanks.” Now blessing and giving of thanks are the two things which characterise the Lord’s Supper. He also describes the meeting in the same words used in chapter xi. as “the whole Church” coming “together into one place.”



The meeting of the Church was, then, for “breaking bread.” The value which Christ set on it is shown, not only from the time and manner of its institution as recorded in the Gospels, but from the special revelation concerning it given afterwards to Paul, who says, “I have received *of the Lord* that which also I delivered unto you” (1 Cor. xi. 23). It was a feast of thanksgiving; a feast calling Christ Himself to mind—“this do in remembrance of ME;” a feast showing His death till His return. It was not a meeting to learn or to pray, but to thank, to praise God for His unspeakable gift, and to worship in the sense of His favour and blessing. The worshippers met, not to receive, but to give, to rejoice before the Lord, and to bless Him in the holy confidence and delight of those whom He had filled to the full with His salvation. They realised Christ’s presence, not merely in authority, but in fellowship, as the One who had said, “I will declare Thy name unto My brethren, in the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto Thee” (Heb. ii. 12). Like every other assembly act, it set forth the oneness of Christ’s body—“for we, being many, are one bread (or loaf), and one body, for we are all partakers of that one loaf” (1 Cor. x. 17).

Praise, worship, thanksgiving, adoration—such were the features of this blessed institution. For this no gift was required. A gift of prayer, a gift of praise, these are man’s thoughts, and, like all else that is of man, quite foreign to the thoughts of God. To quench the Spirit by committing the expression of

praise and thanksgiving to some gifted or official person, or by appointing some president to regulate its expression in others, is among the most daring usurpations of the Holy Ghost's prerogatives that man's presumption has ever made. But though gift was not necessary, indeed had absolutely no place, in connection with the principal object of the meeting, its exercise under the Spirit's guidance was freely permitted. Thus, at the breaking of bread in Troas, "Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts xx. 7). In writing to the Corinthians, he rebukes the way in which the liberty of the Spirit had been abused—"When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation." They were using these gifts for display, not for edification. The apostle, therefore, adds—"Let all things be done unto edifying" (1 Cor. xiv. 26). He then directs how these gifts should be exercised,—unknown tongues were only to be used when there was an interpreter, prophets were to speak two or three, women were not to raise their voice in the assembly, and "all things" were to "be done decently and in order."

But while Scripture here points out the marks of the Spirit's guidance as opposed to the intrusions of the flesh, there is no code laid down, no "order of service" prescribed, no officer appointed to "administer the Lord's Supper." Surely if ever there was a suitable occasion for bringing in such institutions, the disorder

prevailing at Corinth furnished it. Why, then, was it not done ? The supreme action of the Spirit in the assembly was God's purpose, and from this purpose He is not diverted by man's disorder. To meet this He shows how the workings of the flesh and of the Spirit may be distinguished ; but He does not fall back on man's organisation, on a ministry which supersedes the Holy Ghost's sovereignty, or on an officialism which exalts man and sets aside Christ. As long as the Holy Ghost's sovereignty is owned, we have the authority of the Word for saying that there will be order—"for God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all Churches of the saints" (1 Cor. xiv. 33). If then, there is any need felt for man's rules and regulations, it can only be because the Holy Ghost's sovereignty is no longer acknowledged. What sort of an order will it be which man establishes by the deposition of the Spirit ? It will be the order of death, not of life—peace, truly, but, as far as the Spirit is concerned, the peace of the grave !

And now let us cast a momentary glance at the fabric whose details we have been tracing. The Church on earth, as it came from God's hand, was the model of His own Divine thoughts about it. It was the body of Christ, perfect in its oneness, and perfect, too, in its subjection to the Head. It was furnished with an infallible guide to the thoughts and order of God in the Holy Scriptures. It was united with Christ and formed into one body by the Holy Ghost,

who dwelt in its midst, and directed its assemblies. Could anything more perfect, more Divine, be imagined? And how could this fabric be kept, in its outward form down here, what God meant it to be, “a holy temple,” “an habitation of God through the Spirit?” God’s first earthly dwelling-place, a type of the Church, was made fit for His presence by simply following His own directions—“See, saith He, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount.” Only by similar adherence to the heavenly pattern could the Church have been kept according to God’s institution. Subjection to Christ, as exercising authority in the assembly, would have maintained unity of discipline. Subjection to the divinely-given Word, the heavenly pattern, would have maintained unity of doctrine. Subjection to the Holy Ghost, the Divine guide and director, would have maintained unity of order in the assemblies. What would Moses have said, if, when looking at the work of Bezaleel and Aholiab, he had found it different from the pattern showed in the mount, and made to suit their own thoughts of what was right or convenient? Is it a less solemn thing for Christians to set aside the heavenly pattern contained in the Word, and to substitute a tabernacle according to their own devising? When Israel acted on its own thoughts, the results were the golden calf, the strange fire, the gainsaying of Korah. When it observed God’s order, the results were His presence, His service, and His guidance. Which precedent has Christendom followed?

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE CHURCH IN RUINS.

WE have in previous chapters regarded the Church in two different aspects, according to what it is in the mind of God, and according to what it was as established by God on earth, and entrusted to the responsibility of men. Viewed in the first aspect, as the body and bride of Christ, there can be no failure, for it is all of God Himself. Viewed in the second aspect, there has been grievous failure, for it has proved, like everything else, the inability of men to enter into the thoughts and purposes of God. These different views are strikingly presented in two parallel figures. In Ephesians, which pictures the Church according to God's thoughts about it, believers are described as "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone ; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord ; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 20-22). Peter uses similar language, saying, with respect to Christ, "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed in-



deed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house" (1 Pet. ii. 4, 5). In these passages God is the builder, only "living stones" are used as materials, and the result is a spiritual house, a holy temple, a habitation of God. Thanks be to God, no failure on man's part can change this.

When, however, we see the Church, as it has become outwardly under man's responsibility, the same figure is used in a strikingly different way. As the epistle to the Ephesians presents the Church according to God's thoughts, that to the Corinthians presents it according to its outward manifestation to the world. Here, then, the builders are men, not God. The foundation, Christ Himself, is secure, "but let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon;" for "if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire" (1 Cor. iii. 10-13).

The Church, then, viewed according to God's thoughts, is always perfect. The Church, as entrusted to man, soon shows failure, wood, hay, and stubble being built in with the costly material which alone can stand the searching fire of God's scrutiny. A like contrast occurs elsewhere. In the first epistle to Timothy the Church is viewed, not indeed on its heavenly side, but as consisting of real believers holding the truth on earth. It is, therefore, spoken of as



“the house of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. iii. 15). In the second epistle the Church is regarded as the professing mass called by the name of Christ, and it is there described as a “great house,” in which “there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth ; and some to honour and some to dishonour ” (2 Tim. ii. 20).

We have already looked at the Church, as the temple of God, that is, in its heavenly character ; also as the house of God down here on earth, that is, in the practical manifestation which it had as established on earth according to God’s order. We have now to inquire how far man has adhered to this order ; how far the so-called Church, or Christian profession, of the present day corresponds with God’s thoughts ; how far it represents the temple of His building, and how far it is composed of the wood, hay, and stubble of human workmanship. To ascertain this, let us briefly recall the leading features of the Church, as founded by God.

I. It is the body of Christ formed by the Holy Ghost sent down to dwell on earth.

II. As united with a heavenly Head, it is not of the world, but is heavenly in character and hope.

III. It is the witness to the world of the oneness

of the Head with the body, and of the members of the body with each other.

IV. This oneness was to be maintained, as to doctrine and order, by absolute subjection to the Word of God.

V. The local assembly was to show the same oneness as the Church, and all local assemblies were to be kept one with each other in discipline by subjection to the authority of Christ as present in their midst.

VI. Officers belonged to local assemblies, and were appointed by apostolic authority, while gifts belonged to the whole Church, and were bestowed by an ascended Christ.

VII. The assembly met on the first day of the week for the breaking of bread, the Holy Ghost alone regulating the order, and deciding how and by whom gift should be exercised.

I. THE CHURCH IS THE BODY OF CHRIST, FORMED BY THE HOLY GHOST SENT DOWN TO DWELL ON EARTH.—As such it consists only of true believers, real members of Christ's body. Such is God's institution; but what is the Church, as man has made it? Throughout a large part of Christendom, the so-called Church, instead of being the assembly of the saved, is held

forth as the means of salvation. Unconverted persons are urged to come into it, and are told that deliverance from wrath and judgment is to be obtained by its offices. In other cases the Church is a political institution, and every citizen, without respect to his conversion or non-conversion, is entitled to its communion and its privileges. There are considerable exceptions, no doubt, but in one or other of these two classes the enormous preponderance of nominal Christians are included. To the great mass, therefore, of that which bears the name, and is the responsible witness, for Christ on earth, the solemn words of the Judge may be addressed—"I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead" (Rev. iii. 1). The professing Church, instead of consisting only of living members of Christ, has merely a name to live, and is dead—"having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (2 Tim. iii. 5). How needful, then, that where there is true life, the solemn warning should be heeded—"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found thy works perfect before God" (Rev. iii. 2).

The Church, moreover, as instituted by God, was bound, as the body of Christ, to derive everything from Him, to hold "the Head, from which all the body, by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." The Head has furnished the truth necessary for the growth of the body, and this is God's

provision ; the increase thus obtained is “the increase of God.” But what has man made the Church ? Not the recipient, but the decider of truth. So much is this the case that throughout the greater part of Christendom those who are allowed to act as teachers are bound to declare their assent, not to the truth of God contained in the Scriptures, but to the statements of doctrine prepared by the Church, and embodied in certain human creeds. And what are these creeds ? Take the earliest and best, the so-called “apostles’ creed ;” its very first words are in direct contradiction to Scripture—“I believe in God *the Father*, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” The Word ascribes creation to God, but when it speaks of the persons of the Godhead, while it does name the Spirit as taking part, and while it constantly attributes the work to the Son, the Father is never mentioned. It is of the “Word,” that Scripture says—“All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made” (John i. 3). It is of Christ that the apostle declares—“All things were created by Him and for Him, and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist” (Col. i. 16, 17). It is God as displayed in the person of the Son, of whom it is written, “By whom also He made the worlds” (Heb. i. 2). That the Father had a part is not questioned, but is it not ominously suggestive that in man’s very first attempt to deal with such matters, the one person of the Godhead to whom he ascribes creation should be the one person to whom

Scripture does not ascribe it? And yet it is these blundering—in some cases, even blasphemous—creeds, that the Church, as administered by man, has set up for the guidance of believers instead of the living oracles delivered by God. Scripture never refers us for direction to the Church, always to itself. “What,” says the apostle, to those who would set up their own thoughts, “came the Word of God *out from* you, or came it *unto* you only?” (1 Cor. xiv. 36). So Timothy is exhorted by Paul to continue “in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them, and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. iii. 14, 15). Peter classes Paul’s teaching with “the other Scriptures” (2 Pet. iii. 16); and in the above passage Paul sets the truth which he communicated to Timothy side by side with the Old Testament Scriptures of which he there speaks. We know Paul’s teaching only through the New Testament Scriptures, and to these, therefore, together with the others—that is, to the whole Word of God—the believer is referred in the dark times of unbelief and formal profession which the apostle foresees.

But did not the council at Jerusalem decide a doctrinal question? At that time, however, the New Testament was not yet written; while the apostles, who were divinely taught concerning the Church, were there to speak with an authority which now belongs only to the Scriptures. Besides, this was not a

general council of the Church, but merely a local gathering of the Church of Jerusalem. No complete break with Jewish customs had yet been made by this assembly, and such was its influence that there was great danger of the Gentile Churches being led by ignorant or interested teachers to fall into legal bondage. It was, therefore, divinely ordered that this assembly, under the Holy Ghost's guidance, and with apostolic authority, should emphatically repudiate the conduct of such of its members as were seeking to force legal practices upon the Gentiles. All the circumstances were exceptional, and cannot possibly be repeated. This council, then, cannot certainly be pleaded as sanctioning the claim of the Church to settle doctrinal questions. On such matters the Word of God is our only and all-sufficient guide.

II. THE CHURCH, AS UNITED WITH A HEAVENLY HEAD, IS NOT OF THE WORLD, BUT IS HEAVENLY IN ITS CHARACTER AND HOPE.—How has man adhered to this design of God, as taught in Scripture, and practically exemplified in the Church, according to His institution? Some of the ecclesiastical systems claim to govern the world, others have accepted the world's protection, received from the world their doctrine and discipline, and appeal to the world's tribunals to settle questions which can only be divinely decided by the Word of God. Where this open commerce has been repudiated, separation is taken up as a political maxim, urged by political means, made the basis of political



associations. In this case it is, just as much as in the other, an attempt, on the part of the so-called Churches, to regulate the world's politics according to their own views. Is it not sad to see godly and devoted men referring matters concerning the Church to their "parliamentary committees," organising political campaigns, unequally yoking themselves with the world's factions, in order to improve the social standing and prospects of their own denomination, under the vain delusion that worldly advantage will give a greater leverage for the proclamation of spiritual truth? We need not question their motives, but we ask, Is this consistent with a heavenly calling? Can such persons say that the weapons of their warfare are not carnal? Our politics are not of this world, but of heaven. We are crucified with Christ to the world—how, then, can we seek to secure the world's suffrages, avail ourselves of the world's alliances, or desire to regulate the world's affairs?

In another form of worldliness, too, almost all sects are equally implicated, vying with each other in their efforts to please the flesh, and to allure the world. I am not speaking of ritualism, which attaches a superstitious significance to various acts, but to the avowed attempt to secure the admiration of the world by artistic display, by magnificent buildings, by richly toned organs, and by highly paid choirs, often composed of singers who make no pretence to personal faith in the Lord Jesus. And this is only a specimen of the way in which the world's approval is bid for, and the world's support demanded. Persons

asked to take the chair at their meetings, not for their piety, but for their social position—subscriptions sought by importunate begging, utterly regardless of whether the givers are the children of God, or the children of the wicked one—bazaars, conversaziones, and all sorts of worldly devices resorted to for the sake of raising money or of attracting favour—different Churches and associations pitted against each other as to which can secure the largest collections—talents, elegance, and accomplishments sought in the preacher in order that the worldly estimation of the sect may be raised, and its ministers may be deemed fully abreast with the progress of the age—all these, and multitudes of other symptoms which can hardly fail to suggest themselves to the reader, indicate the set of the current, not in those great religious apostasies where the spirit of the world might naturally be looked for, but in those denominations which have, as to many things, made a real stand for truth, and which contain large numbers of the Lord's children.

And if the heavenly character and heavenly dependence have almost disappeared, what shall we say of the heavenly hope? Alas! Christians are for the most part seeking to civilise and improve the world by Christianity, rather than to gather a people out of the world, who shall stand with their loins girt about and their lamps burning, and they themselves like unto men that wait for their Lord. As the Church lost her heavenly calling and gave her heart up to the world, she began to say—"My Lord delayeth His coming;" and "Where is the promise of His coming?" is what

the great bulk of believers, like the scoffers of the last days, are now incredulously asking. Surely these things furnish food for sorrowful reflection to those who inquire how far the Lord's people have entered into His thoughts concerning the Church.

III. THE CHURCH IS THE WITNESS TO THE WORLD OF THE ONENESS OF THE HEAD WITH THE BODY, AND OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BODY WITH EACH OTHER.—As such, in perfect, Divine oneness, God set it on the earth—the image of the oneness of Christ, the testimony to the sending of the Son by the Father. Could a sadder contrast be conceived than between the beautiful vessel launched by God's hand, and the floating fragments of wreck now tossing far and wide on the waves and currents of this restless world? Instead of all believers meeting round the person of Christ, His name is the only centre which is not known. There is no difference of doctrine too trivial, no variety of discipline too microscopic, to form the rallying point of a separate denomination; no name too insignificant to become the label of a distinct sect. No need to dwell on the humiliating picture, the details of which are familiar to every eye. To gather up the fragments of wreck, and reconstruct the shattered vessel, is impossible. But are we on that account to shut our eyes to the fact that under man's pilotage this disastrous shipwreck has happened, and that the professing Church is responsible for the ruin into which it has fallen? Alas! if Christians only

recognised this fact, and took their place, like Daniel of old, in confession before God, there would still be blessing, though there could never be restoration.

But man has got so filled with his own thoughts, and so divorced from the thoughts of God, that he has begun to regard these divisions as rather beneficial than injurious. He has ceased to ask, like the apostle, "Is Christ divided?" ceased to regard the least approach to diversity with the jealous apprehension of those who watch for the Lord's glory, and judging everything by the low standard of his own thoughts, scoffs at the Divine unity as a cramped and slavish conception, and rejoices in a thousand-fold diversity as a proof of his own mental independence. He compares the various sects to the various rays of coloured light refracted from a prism, each one of which is necessary to the light of the perfect beam; forgetting that God's light is not the light, after it has been twisted and scattered by human prisms, but the light as it proceeds direct from His own mind. No doubt it proves that in which man glories, the range and activity of his own mind. What it does not prove is his subjection to the mind of God.

IV. THE ONENESS OF THE CHURCH WAS TO BE MAINTAINED, AS TO DOCTRINE AND ORDER, BY ABSOLUTE SUBJECTION TO THE WORD OF GOD.—In this book we have the perfect revelation of God's mind, and to its teaching He demands absolute obedience. Here is the Divine chart by which the vessel committed to man's

responsibility might be steered through every strait. What has man done with it? Thinking the chart insufficient for his guidance, he has added to it lines and marks of his own, either deviating from the divinely furnished plan altogether, or putting in numerous other tracings according to his own fancy. God's fathomings of truth and error were not good enough for him; he must let down the little plummet of his own philosophy and note the more accurate soundings thus obtained! Is it wonderful that the Church, so piloted, made shipwreck? The grand truth needed for our day is this of entire subjection to God's Word, not only in what we call great things, but in small things too. God does not demand subjection as far as we think proper, but that *every thought* should be brought into captivity. And this implies, not only obedience to what is written, but rejection of what is not written. To refuse the former is to deny the obligation of God's Word; to refuse the latter is to deny its sufficiency. To maintain that I may depart by a hair's-breadth from what *is* written, is to declare my judgment better than God's. To maintain that I may do what is *not* written, is to declare God's directions imperfect.

How wide the departure has been in doctrine is familiar to all. There is no need, however, to call up the grosser errors of the professing Church—the purgatories, the prayers to the Virgin, the intercession of saints, the penances, the indulgences, and the other glaring forms of evil—in evidence of this departure.



Take the comparatively pure doctrine of Protestant countries, and contrast it with the Word of God. The great mass of believers, if they have given up the law as the ground of justification, have retained it as the rule of Christian walk. Having absolutely lost all sense of the heavenly calling, they are content to take as their standard the law of commandments contained in ordinances, which was suited to a fleshly religion and a worldly people. By the majority of professing Christians, eternal life as a present fact is thought a mere dream, and the claim to its possession an almost impious presumption. The complete setting aside of man after the flesh is to most an unmeaning phrase, and conversion and the new birth signify nothing more than a bettering of the nature which God has declared hopelessly bad. Hence how few even among real Christians there are who possess entire deliverance and settled peace. The great and all-important fact of the Spirit's present abode in the world, the leading feature of the work in which God is now engaged, is treated as "another craze." The hope of the Lord's return for His saints is scoffed at as a fanciful delusion. And all this ignorance of God's truth is found among the teachers and leaders of religious thought in the so-called evangelical denominations of Christendom.

Nor has the departure from God's order in the Church been less conspicuous or disastrous than the departure from His doctrinal teaching. Indeed, while as to doctrine there has been a measure of return to God's truth, as to Church order the departure con-



tinues as wide as ever. The horrible mass of corruption in the professing Church in the days of Luther compelled him and all who cared for God's glory to come out. Instead of adopting Church principles, however, as laid down in God's Word, they threw themselves into the arms of the civil power, and in return for its aid placed themselves under the authority of the state. In Protestant countries, the state took the place of the Pope ; and the Church, though cleansed from some gross corruptions, became just as much the tool of the world and the centre of political intrigue, just as destitute of Divine life and stricken with spiritual atrophy, as the Church of Rome itself, without even the show of unity which this still retained. The ever-increasing corruption and deadness of the political Churches drove spiritual men outside again ; but once more, instead of finding the true principles of the Church of God, they set up Churches of their own. In these they either sought unity by human organisation, thus perpetuating the evils against which they protested, or else they lost sight of the fact that unity was God's principle. Sect after sect arose, gathered round the person of some great leader, or knotted into factitious oneness by common opinions as to the most expedient mode of Church government.

In a few cases there may have been an attempt to return to some forgotten principle of order in God's Word, though in these the influence of tradition and the want of thoroughness is painfully evident. In

the majority of cases, however, rules of government were adopted simply from motives of expediency. The Scriptures were not dishonestly twisted to suit the new constitutions, for their authors supposed that these matters of Church order were just left to man's will and wisdom. But this involves two things, an admission that the Word of God is not a sufficient guide under all circumstances, and a splitting up of the Church into all sorts of sects according to man's varying thoughts as to the best mode of ecclesiastical government. It implies, therefore, a virtual setting aside of God's authority, a lowering of the claims of Scripture, and the outward ruin of the Church. How it has worked in practice is easily seen. Men have thought it expedient to adopt their own constitutions instead of adhering to God's order. But if one set of persons may adopt one constitution, another may adopt another. Unity, therefore, is of course impossible. But what made it impossible? Simply that man's diverse thoughts have been brought in to supplement or set aside the Word of God.

Here is the simple and sufficient origin of all the sects. If a person objects—"Well, but how are we to help this? The mischief has been done, and no action on our part can repair it"—the question I would ask is this: Are you yourself personally free from the guilt which has brought this evil in? Are you allowing anything which the Word of God either distinctly forbids, or does not expressly sanction? If you are, the first step you have to take is to separate

yourself from this thing. It is of no use contending that you are not answerable for the divisions, so long as you are going on with the insubjection and disobedience which caused the divisions. You *are* answerable for the legitimate consequences of your own acts. And if the legitimate and inevitable consequence of bringing in man's thoughts to override and overstep God's revealed mind is the rending in pieces of the body of Christ, the only way in which you can escape the responsibility of such a result is by personally abandoning whatever there may be in your conduct or position which in any way contributes to it. Act faithfully in this, and the next step will soon be made plain.

V. THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY WAS TO SHOW THE SAME ONENESS AS THE CHURCH, AND ALL LOCAL ASSEMBLIES WERE TO BE KEPT ONE WITH EACH OTHER IN DISCIPLINE BY SUBJECTION TO THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST AS PRESENT IN THEIR MIDST.—How has man adhered in this respect to the Divine model? What has he made of the local assembly? Under his administration, the local assembly, as an outward, visible thing has ceased to exist. Where is the Church of London or of Paris? In Scripture use, the Church of London is the whole body of believers in London, meeting together, not of course in the same place, but in manifested oneness. Where is such an assembly to be found now? Nowhere. Then God's institution as to the local

expression of the one body has been entirely lost—absolutely effaced from the world.

And what has taken its place? In each town there are a multitude of sects, divided in discipline, in doctrine, or in something which isolates them from the others, some more or less friendly with their neighbours, and admitting a certain amount of intercommunion, others holding a position of complete separation, or even of avowed antagonism. In some of these sects, care is taken to receive into fellowship only those of whose conversion there is reasonable evidence; in others nothing further is demanded than the desire of the person asking for communion; in others, again, the right is conceded either as a political privilege or as a means of bestowing life on those who are admitted to be spiritually dead. Thus instead of order, there is chaos; instead of unity, division; instead of a local assembly, a broken mass of sects not one of which can claim for itself the leading characteristics of the Church of God. Even in these sects, taken by themselves, the order of the Church is utterly given up. Each local meeting is, in some cases, independent of all others. Where there is any common government it is brought about either by the rule of the state, or by an organisation wholly of man's devising. All these plans are widely at variance with the teaching of God's Word. This enjoins unity, but it is the unity springing from the oneness of Christ's action in the assembly, and to

substitute for this an artificial unity of man's contriving is as much opposed to His order as the open abandonment of oneness for the fuller exercise of local independence.

VI. OFFICERS BELONGED TO LOCAL ASSEMBLIES, AND WERE APPOINTED BY APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY, WHILE GIFTS BELONGED TO THE WHOLE CHURCH, AND WERE BESTOWED BY AN ASCENDED CHRIST.—Such was God's wisely ordained institution, the reason for which will afterwards appear, though even if our intelligence could not comprehend the reason, the fact that it is God's plan should be sufficient. Man, however, has almost invariably joined what God has separated. There were two kinds of officers, deacons, who served tables, and elders and bishops, who had a pastoral care over the flock. Both these were appointed by apostles or apostolic delegates, and no directions are given for their appointment in any other way. But some of the human systems called Churches have made the bishop, instead of one of several officers of a local assembly, an officer over several local assemblies. No such officer is named in Scripture, and to appoint one is to forsake God's order. Others have confounded the elder or bishop with the deacon, and have made the appointment one of popular election, both of which are in direct contradiction with the teaching of God's Word. In some cases the bishop and elders, which in Scripture are the same, have been made quite different officers, and the bishop has been invested



with the totally unscriptural power of ordaining the presbyter or elder.

But what is far more important than any mistake as to the exact functions of bishops and deacons, is the invention of an officer called "*the minister*," to whom, in his official capacity, belong the sole exercise of gift, the sole regulation of the service, and the sole administration of the "sacraments." I say this officer is a simple invention of man's mind. Deacons and elders are the only officers spoken of in God's Word, and neither of these bears the slightest resemblance to the person we have just described. In the first place, there were several deacons and several elders in each local assembly. And next, there is not a word which confers on either of these officers the right, by virtue of his office, of exercising his own gift, or of regulating the exercise of gift in others. An officer might or might not have gift, but if he exercised his gift it was not because of his office, and if he fulfilled his office it was not because of his gift. Gift is simply the endowment of a risen Christ, and to ask man's sanction for its exercise is to set man up against Christ. It is given to the Church as a whole, and to make regulations which confine it to a particular assembly, is to presume by human rules to thrust aside the order of God. It is to be exercised under the guidance of the Spirit, and to lay down a code as to the manner of its exercise is to usurp the functions of the Holy Ghost. The apostle Paul himself would never have dared to ordain or appoint a person to



act as evangelist, pastor, or teacher—still less to combine these three gifts in one ; but if he would have shrunk from this as a usurpation of Christ's authority, what would he have said about ordaining such a person to an official position which neither evangelist, pastor, nor teacher, ever possessed, about bestowing upon him the Holy Ghost's function of regulating the order of the assembly, and about authorising him to administer the sacraments in direct contravention of the Word of God ?

VII. THE ASSEMBLY MET ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK FOR THE BREAKING OF BREAD, THE HOLY GHOST ALONE REGULATING THE ORDER, AND DECIDING HOW AND BY WHOM GIFT SHOULD BE EXERCISED.—Man, however, setting aside God's order, has made the Lord's Supper merely an occasional meeting, putting teaching, evangelising, or some other thing, into the place of prominence which the Lord gave to His own supper. He has defended this, not as scriptural, but because constant repetition might destroy its solemnity ! If theatrical effect is what is sought, this will doubtless be the case. But what a thought for a believer to cherish ! God's institution set aside, because man knows so much better than He ! The remembrance of Christ and His matchless love become so familiar that at length it breeds contempt ! Such is the working of man's mind when it strays from simple obedience, and brings in its own wisdom to supplement or supplant the teaching of God. And yet it is to the

exercise of this wisdom that we are abandoned the moment we depart from the living oracles. That the mode of celebrating the Lord's Supper is as unscriptural as its infrequency, we have already seen. I am not alluding to those who attach to it a sacrificial efficacy, nor to those even who look at it as a "means of grace," a kind of spur occasionally given to the sluggish conscience and heart; but to those who have retained, at least in a certain measure, a true apprehension of the nature of the feast. Even among these, with few exceptions, the liberty of the Spirit is not owned, and the supper is "administered" by a sacerdotal or official person wholly unknown, either for that or any other purpose, in the Word of God.

Let us cast our eye, then, over this wide scene of ruin and desolation. There is absolutely nothing that God has instituted which man has not perverted or destroyed. If God has set up the Church as the body of Christ, man has converted it into a means of salvation, by which a person may be made into a member of Christ. If God has put it in subjection to Christ, man has made it the rival of Christ, and the authoritative judge of doctrinal truth. If God has made it heavenly in its character, its resources, and its hopes, man has lowered it to a worldly standard, has claimed for it worldly support, and has given it worldly expectations. If God has established a Divine unity, man has broken it up into a chaos of rival sects and jarring systems. If God has given it the Word as its

Divine guide, man has called in his own wisdom to supply the deficiencies, or correct the errors of which, in his arrogance, he accuses the Scriptures. If God has instituted local assemblies to express the oneness of the assembly in each city, man has split them up into a thousand detached masses, not one of which is gathered on the true principles of the Church. If God has instituted local officers, man has perverted them to every purpose except that for which they were appointed, has set aside the scriptural mode of ordination for the inventions of his own brain, and has invested them with a character which God never conferred upon them or upon any other human being. If God gave gifts to the Church, man has insisted that these gifts should be exercised only according to his own will, should be restrained within the limits of an official class, and should be tied down to the narrow circle of a local assembly. If God made office local, man has made it general; and if God made gift general, man has made it local. If God separated gift and office, man has insisted upon their union, regardless of whether the officer possesses gift, or the gifted person possesses the qualifications for office. If God has left the exercise of gift free in the assembly, to be guided only by His own Spirit, man has deposed the Spirit by giving the authority to an officer of his own appointment. If God has gathered the assembly together with the special object of remembering Christ according to His own institution, man has thrust this institution into a corner, made it the exceptional in-

stead of the principal object of gathering together, and put his own supposed profit in the place of prominence which Christ claims for the memorials of His death.

It may, indeed, be pleaded with perfect truth that the practices here pointed out as contrary to the Word of God, had already begun in times closely following, if not even overlapping, the apostles' days. This is constantly urged by writers, not only of those denominations which profess to receive the traditions of the fathers, but of those which profess to repudiate them, in defence of one or other of the institutions now found among the varied sects. But what reason is there for assuming that those who immediately followed the apostles were purer in doctrine, or more tenacious of God's order, than modern Christians? They had the same guide that we have—the Word of God, and if they departed from it, we are bound to judge their departure, instead of following it. To draw conclusions from the practice of the early Church is to test the truth of God's Word by the fathers, instead of testing the truth of the fathers by God's Word. Surely every reader of the New Testament must see that we have not to wait for the days of the apostolic fathers to detect the signs of ruin, but that they are plainly marked in the epistles themselves. The Corinthians had introduced sectarianism, allowed immorality, tolerated drunkenness at the Lord's table. The Galatians had fallen from the principle of justification by faith. The Colossians were being beguiled by Jewish traditions and Greek

philosophy. At Rome people were preaching Christ “of envy and strife.” Even of Paul’s personal companions, all were seeking their own, not the things of Christ. Later, Diotrophes refuses the apostle John. Of the seven Churches in Asia, five are called upon to repent; one had lost its first love; another was tolerating the grossest evil; a third was almost wholly given up to wickedness; a fourth had a name to live, but was dead; a fifth, self-complacent and lukewarm, was so nauseous to Christ that He threatens to spue it out of His mouth. The word is full of warnings of coming evil, and the flood had already risen to a fearful height before the canon of Scripture was closed. Ecclesiastical history shows that the waters swelled to a still more disastrous deluge with awful rapidity afterwards. Such, then, in and immediately after apostolic times, was the failing, ruinous, Christ-dishonouring state to which the Church had sunk under man’s guidance. Yet from this armoury writers of almost all denominations are willing to borrow weapons for the sake of parrying the thrust of “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God !”

## CHAPTER VIII.

### SEPARATION FROM EVIL THE PATH OF OBEDIENCE.

IN looking over the sterile scene pictured in our last chapter, we cannot refrain from asking, whence flow the bitter waters which have converted this garden of the Lord's planting into such a wilderness of death? The poisonous spring is not difficult to discover. Insubjection is the one copious fountain head from which all these streams of sorrow have issued—insubjection to Christ, insubjection to the Spirit, insubjection to the Word. The presence and authority of Christ in the assembly were disowned; the guidance of the Spirit was withstood by the flesh; and when disorder necessarily ensued, recourse was had to the wisdom of man rather than to the teaching of the Word of God.

What, then, is the remedy? It is manifest that if the mischief has been brought in by insubjection, the first step towards deliverance is to cease from insubjection. The Lord's order is—"Cease to do evil, learn to do well" (Isa. i. 16, 17). A father would not go on telling his child what he wished, so long as he was wilfully disobeying what he had already told



him. He would say, "Do what I have bidden you, and then I will let you know what more I want you to do." God deals with us as children, and He has made obedience the condition of progress—"If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God" (John vii. 17). If we have fallen into error from taking counsel of men, His first demand is that we go back to His own Word, start again in His own way. When David's sin in taking counsel of his captains as to the bringing up of the ark had led him into the grievous error which resulted in the death of Uzzah, it was not enough for him to warn others against Uzzah's folly. The whole work must be stopped, the mode altogether changed, and the Word of God consulted, instead of the captains, as to the right way of carrying the ark. When this was done, and not till then, was the ark brought up with joy and rejoicing.

It is clear, then, that no compromises, no attempts to improve the present condition of things, no efforts to mitigate some of the more crying evils, will suit the case. This is merely avoiding the sin of Uzzah; it is not following the Lord's commandments. Unions of Christians, evangelical alliances, and other attempts to talk to each other over denominational fences, may be of value as indicating the restless sense, in the hearts of many believers, that such fences are not of God. But beyond this they are of no value at all. Either the fences are according to the mind of God, or they are contrary to it. If they are according to

His mind, they ought never to be passed ; if they are contrary to His mind, they ought never to be erected. Catholicity, charity, in the sense in which it is now used, and all the other attempted palliatives, are like dressing the eruption of a man in the small-pox instead of seeking to reach the roots of the disease. Nay, they are worse, for they are merely taking counsel of man again how to remedy the mischief which man's counsel has already brought in ; whereas the one resource of faith when it has stumbled through the leading of man is to fall back upon the teaching of God. It is no use trying to make sects more friendly, if sectarianism itself is contrary to God's Word. For the same reason, it is no use trying to make a sect somewhat better, to purge it of some of its more serious defects, for this does not touch the root of the evil. If the very fact of its being a sect is a departure from God's Word, the only remedy, the only path of obedience, is to come out of it. We have seen that God's Word denounces sects, that their existence is contrary to His mind, and if we would return to His way, therefore, the first step is to sever ourselves from all sectarian connections.

But here the question may be raised—What is a sect ? To answer this we must go back to first principles, and inquire what is the cause of the divisions out of which sects have arisen. This cause is, as we have seen, insubjection to the Word of God. Only by absolute obedience to this standard, only by the disallowance of everything not enjoined in this volume,

could sectarianism have been prevented and unity maintained. Everything, therefore, is a sect which will not stand this test. It has in its nature the fatal root out of which the sectarian poison is distilled. Tried by this standard, both the Church of Rome and all the national Churches are sects, for where do we find in the Word of God any person exercising authority like that of the Pope, any order of ecclesiastics like that of the cardinals, any form of episcopal government like that either of Rome or England? Where do we see the state, the world, appointing ministers, laying down forms of worship, or deciding points of doctrine? Coming, then, to the various dissenting denominations, we find, for the most part, their zealous assertion of the right to think and act as they like, to form constitutions according to their own thoughts, and to break into separate communities as best suits their own inclinations and convenience. Thus their very starting point is in direct antagonism with God's Word, which condemns sects; and is an express assertion of man's right to bring in his own thoughts and his own wisdom to supplement the Spirit's teaching. Nor, in coming to details, do we find more subjection. Where is the scriptural authority for deciding by conferences or synods in what places preachers shall exercise their gift? Where the warrant for the election of ministers by popular assemblies? Where do we find in the Word the human distinction between clergy and laity? Where the existence of single officers in the local assembly, to whom the

exercise of gift is restricted? Where does Scripture speak of official persons administering the sacraments? Where does it sanction the thrusting of the Lord's Supper aside as the object of assembling together, and converting it into a monthly or quarterly celebration? Where the entire throwing away of both the Lord's Supper and baptism as symbols which believers are not now called upon to use?

Romanism, nationalism, and all the varied forms of dissent are alike in this, that they have each departed from the pure standard of Scripture as their only guide. Some have deviated, some have added, some have subtracted—but all have departed from it as the sole and all-sufficient test. No need to dwell on the grosser errors of doctrine, or the monstrous pretensions of worldly hierarchies. It is enough for us that they have not adhered absolutely to the Word, for in this lies the real germ of sectarianism. It is not a question as to whether they hold more or less doctrinal truth, whether they have among them a greater or smaller number of genuine believers. The only question which the person who wishes to act in subjection to God's will needs to ask, is, whether there is entire surrender to the teaching of the Word; and if anything is practised which that Word does not sanction, or anything omitted which it does sanction, the system is a sect, and his duty is to separate himself from it.

“What!” it may be asked, “would it not be better to stay in it and try to improve it?” But if

it is a sect, it is contrary to God's mind ; and to stay in what is known to be contrary to God's mind is disobedience ? Is it by going on in disobedience that we can hope to help others to obedience ? The only road towards improvement is obedience, and for a man to continue in disobedience because he wants to make others obedient, is like a man throwing himself into the mud because he wants to make others clean. No, the first step towards obedience is to cease from disobedience, the first step towards setting others right is to get right one's self. Those who are ignorantly and conscientiously in error are small transgressors indeed, compared with those who are wilfully in it ; and for one to remain wilfully in it for the sake of helping those who are ignorantly in it, is for the man with the beam in his eye to offer to take the mote out of his brother's eye. This is simple hypocrisy. To such an one the Lord says—" *First* cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye " (Matt. vii. 5).

Separation from evil is always God's principle of action. If we are on God's ground, separation must be effected by putting away the evil. If we are not on God's ground, separation must be effected by coming out of the evil. Achan's sin brought defilement on Israel, and the Lord said—" Neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you " (Joshua vii. 12). This is the first kind of separation. Israel was on God's ground,



and the true principle was not to go out of Israel, but to put away the evil from it. But when Israel sinned in setting up the golden calf under Mount Sinai, the Lord withdrew His presence altogether, and refused to go up with the congregation. Now the case was different, and Moses, instead of remaining in the defiled camp to try and make matters better, "took the tabernacle and pitched it *without the camp, afar off from the camp*" (Ex. xxxiii. 7); where he remained until his intercession brought the Lord once more into their midst. This is the second kind of separation. Israel had got off God's ground, and the true principle was not to remain within, hoping there to deal with the evil, but to take a place without. Was this self-righteousness? Never was Moses more lowly, more prostrate before the Lord, than when he took this place. Was it want of love? Never did the yearning of his heart towards Israel show itself in tenderer entreaty. Was it selfish abandonment of the people? Never did he so truly serve them as when he thus withdrew from their midst. How could he have interceded for them with God so long as, by remaining among them, he was really identified with them? Having separated himself clean from them, gone "afar off" from the defilement they had contracted, he could, and did, strive effectually with God on their behalf. We must take God's side against evil, before we can have power with Him in intercession for those who are in it.

Now it is this last sort of separation that Christians



who would walk faithfully are called upon to make. All the various sects and systems of Christendom are off God's ground. They may contain multitudes of true and godly believers, hold much pure doctrine, show much zeal and devotion for the Lord's service, but, as sects, they are not according to God's mind. To remain in them is to identify one's self with them, that is, to become responsible for the departure they have made from God's order and Word. The place of obedience, the place of blessing, the place of power, the place of intercession, is outside—"afar off." Even in Babylon, the corrupt Christian profession of the last days, there are the Lord's people, but the word is—"Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins" (Rev. xviii. 4).

In another description which we have of Christendom in its last stage, when the "profane and vain babblings" had already begun, which should "increase unto more ungodliness," the believer's ground of comfort is that "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour and some to dishonour. *If a man, therefore, purge himself from these*, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Tim. ii. 16-21). Now, what is the state of things here depicted? A

Christian profession in which all sorts of evil have entered, so that none but the Lord Himself can detect His own amidst the mass of worldly religion and empty formalism. What, then, characterises the faithful? They call upon the name of the Lord and they separate themselves from iniquity. The two things are closely connected together. Finding every name thrust into prominence except the name of Christ—whether names of countries or names of men, names of doctrines or names of systems—Churches of England and Churches of Scotland, Lutherans and Wesleyans, Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists and Independents—they ask, “Is Christ divided?” Was Wesley crucified for us? or were we baptized in the name of Luther? Have we God’s authority for meeting in any other name but that of Christ? Are we not bound, then, to depart from these unscriptural and unauthorised modes of gathering, to revert simply to the name of Christ, the teaching of the Word, and the guidance of the Spirit? They learn to judge, not believers in the various sects, but the sects themselves, as being evil, the work of man, and contrary to the Word of God, and so to separate themselves, to purge themselves that they may become vessels unto honour.

Of course the “iniquity” here spoken of is not merely, or even chiefly, sectarianism. But this very epistle sets up the Word of God as the one and only standard for the Christian’s guidance in the chaos of doctrines and systems which would distinguish the last days. The apostle knew how men would jumble

up the Scriptures to suit their own notions, and he, therefore, insists on the importance of "rightly dividing the word of truth." He knew how "evil men and seducers" would "wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived," and he casts back the believer simply on the Word of God. What, then, is the standard and measure of iniquity but departure from this rule of faith? If I am mixed up with anything not sanctioned by the Word, whence does it come? Not from the Spirit, for the Spirit expressly refers me to the Word. Then it must come from the flesh, and the Spirit tells me that in the "flesh dwelleth *no* good thing" (Rom. vii. 18).

It is surely a deeply solemn matter to be taking counsel of the flesh, and refusing to take counsel of God's Word. What is the estimate which God has given us respectively of these two things? "It is the Spirit that quickeneth," says our Lord; "the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life" (John vi. 63). Nothing is more marked than the authority which is claimed for Scripture all through the sacred volume. To the Jews it was said—"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. viii. 20). And if *we* speak not according to the word we have received, is there any more light in us? How solemn is the language contained in the closing book of the Scriptures—"I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man

shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev. xxii. 18, 19). This, it is true, is said only of one particular book; but if God has so solemnly fenced round one book from man's intrusion, does He leave the others open to be accepted or rejected just so far as shall suit man's ideas of convenience or expediency? No, the only standard of good and bad in the things of God is His own Word. Whatever conforms to this rule rests on an absolutely immovable foundation. Whatever departs from it, whether by addition, alteration, or subtraction, is "iniquity"—is the working of the flesh—is the wood, hay, and stubble of human construction which will be burnt up in the day when "it shall be revealed by fire."

But here two questions may arise. The first is—supposing a person to be useful, busily employed in good works, apparently owned of the Lord in his labours, can it be right for him to give up his position of influence, to abandon the sphere of effort in which he is made a blessing, and to go out, he knows not whither—probably to a place where he may find little room for his exertions, a far smaller audience for his preaching or teaching, and at all events where the fruits of his past labours must be lost or abandoned to others? I can fully sympathise with the feeling

of doubt and hesitation. After all, however, what is it but balancing expediency against obedience? No doubt, if I look to man, I find a far wider scope for a Christian's influence inside sects than outside. But this is looking to man when I am called upon to look to God. How would Moses have decided if he had argued on grounds of expediency? He would have said—"I must remain in the camp. I am more needed here than I ever was. By going outside I shall lose all the power and influence I can now employ for the people's good." Instead of thus arguing with the flesh, he acted in the energy of the Spirit, pitched the tabernacle "without the camp, afar off," and thus took his stand alone for the Lord. What was the consequence? "It came to pass that every one which sought the Lord went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which was without the camp" (Exod. xxxiii. 7). Instead of alienating himself from those who sought the Lord, he drew them to him. He got into the position of power—power with God, and power for blessing to men.

Take another case. Saul was ordered to destroy the Amalekites with their flocks and their herds. Instead of simple obedience, he acted according to his own thoughts of what was right. He was not regardless of the Lord. Far from it: he and "the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord." It was the wisdom and religion of the flesh, judging for itself in the things of the Lord, instead of letting the Lord judge; preferring service,



in man's way, to obedience in God's way. What does God reply? "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Sam. xv. 22, 23). Have these Old Testament narratives no voice for us? Is God more indifferent about obedience now than He was in the days of Saul? Or are we better able to judge of what is right than Saul was, that, like him, we should set up our judgment against God's? Let us consider against whom we are matching ourselves, and ask, with the apostle,—“Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?” What is the wisdom of man that it should exalt itself against God? Is it not “written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent?” The Lord does not need our service, but He does need our obedience. By remaining in a sect, there may be a wider field of apparent usefulness, more to show in the eyes of the world; but if, by thus remaining, we are acting in conscious disobedience to the Lord's will, we shall assuredly find that what “is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”

The second question which suggests itself in connection with this subject of separation is—“Am I to go out and stand all alone, with, perhaps, no other human being to have communion with me, occupying a posi-



tion of absolute isolation as respects fellow-believers?" This is certainly not the Lord's order. But we live in a state of things when God's order has been superseded by man's disorder. The Lord calls us to fellowship with Himself and with one another, but He demands that we should "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." If man and Satan have corrupted God's truth, set aside God's order, and abandoned the guidance of God's Word, I must separate myself from this. It is not separation from believers, but separation from that which believers are taking up without sanction from Scripture, separation from that which grieves and quenches the Spirit, *godly* separation from that which causes *ungodly* separation. Instead of dividing me from my fellow-Christians, it is taking God's side against such divisions, declaring that I come out to the only ground where such divisions can have no place, and that I leave behind the whole sphere in which such divisions are tolerated.

But while, in coming out to the Lord's name, one is doubtless taking the only position compatible with Christian unity, it must be admitted that *outwardly* the place is often one of extreme trial and painful isolation. Has the Lord ever promised, however, that the Christian's path shall be an easy one? Has He not said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation?" And what is to be our comfort? That He has overcome the world. If, then, such a position be taken in obedience to Him, and in fellowship with Him, shall we shrink from it because of the

worldly trials it involves? With Him who has overcome the world on our side, shall we sink beneath its ridicule or its reproach, its condemnation or its contempt? Can we not rather rejoice that we are "counted worthy to suffer shame for His name?"—that unto us "it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake?"—that we are called, in however small a measure, to "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in our flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church?" Surely we do not forget, that "if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him," or "that the trial of our faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire," will "be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." Moses took a lonely and trying path when he gave up all his worldly prospects in Egypt to identify himself with the despised and down-trodden children of Israel; but he saw things according to God's thoughts, not according to man's, and, therefore, "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter," "esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." To shrink from the path of obedience because I may stand alone is to declare that I prefer the fellowship of man to the fellowship of God. To shrink from it because it may involve earthly suffering and loss is to prefer the treasures of Egypt to the reproach of Christ. No, if, as we have seen, all these sects have taken a

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position more or less out of harmony with God's Word—if the very fact of their sectarian standing is in itself inconsistent with His revealed thoughts about His Church—I have not to weigh consequences, not to be counting costs, but in simple obedience and faith in Him, to separate from everything that is contrary to His mind, to go forth unto Christ “without the camp, bearing His reproach.”

## CHAPTER IX.

### GOD'S PROVISION FOR THE FAITHFUL.

SEPARATION from evil is, as we have seen, the first step in the path of obedience. Christendom, with its sects, its human organisations, its departure from the simple truth of God, has become the great house, and from all that is not according to God's mind, the obedient are called to purge themselves. We have seen that this may involve trial and isolation. But while it is quite possible that in walking obediently, in separating from all denominational ties, the believer may find himself absolutely alone, this is not the Lord's usual way. He may thus test our faith. Where He does so, however, the circumstances are peculiar, a departure from His ordinary plan for some special purpose. In most cases, where a believer thus takes a stand for the Lord against the world, he finds one or more who have been led in the same path, and taught the same blessed truths. If so, these can meet simply in the Lord's name ; nay, they are bound to do so, for it is His own Divine institution. "Let us consider one another," says the apostle, "to provoke unto love and to good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Heb. x. 24, 25). While on the one hand, the believer is to "depart from iniquity," he is, on the

other, to follow "peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." He cannot have fellowship with that which is contrary to the Lord's mind, and must therefore separate from sects ; but he is to desire fellowship with all the Lord's people, and should there be any walking in a godly way, who are willing to meet with him simply in the name of the Lord Jesus, he is bound to receive them and meet with them. Were there but two persons in the world assembled in this manner, they would be the two meeting in the Lord's way and on the Lord's ground.

But though those gathered out in the Lord's name in any particular locality form a meeting there, this meeting is not independent of those who assemble in the same name in any other place. Though the Church is in ruins, the principle of the Church remains intact according to God's institution. Those who, in every part of the world, meet together in the Lord's name are all one, each local assembly being but the representative of the oneness in its own town or village, and exercising discipline there, not as an independent body, but in real concert with the whole, whose joint action is secured, not by any human organisation or mutual correspondence, but by the oneness of the action of Christ in all the assemblies. It is a matter of faith, not of sight—but none the less, so long as Christ's authority is owned and felt, a Divine and blessed reality.

Is this, then, it may be asked, a restoration of the Church ? And is the local meeting the Church of the

place? No, by no means. The Church is the whole body of believers in the world, and the Church of any place is the whole body of believers in the place. It would lead to confusion, arrogance, and intense sectarianism if those meeting in this way made any such claim. They are neither *the* Church, which means the whole of the believers now living; nor *a* Church, in the unscriptural sense in which the word is now used, meaning a sect cut off from the rest of believers by human regulations and barriers. What are they, then? They are those who, amidst the ruins of Christendom, having separated from the sects which divide it, for none of which they can find any Scripture foundation, have come out simply to the name of Jesus, refuse everything for which there is no warrant in the Word of God, and own no guidance except that of the Holy Spirit. Though they are not the Church, therefore, they have reverted to Church ground, and their gathering is on exactly the same principle as that of the apostolic assemblies. True they are in the midst of ruin, and numbers of the Lord's children, being unseparated in heart or intelligence from the ruin, do not meet with them. In fact, they are a mere handful, despicable in numbers, in worldly influence, in everything that meets the natural eye or satisfies the natural heart; but they have taken God's ground, and represent, though of course with much feebleness and failure, God's order in the midst of man's confusion.

Having, then, taken Church ground, while they



must carefully bear in mind that they are not the Church, they are entitled to reckon on the blessings, the governments, and the gifts which God has bestowed on the Church, except indeed, so far as these in their nature can only belong to the Church in its perfect condition. Being gathered together in the Lord's way, and in the Lord's name, they can count on His presence. Every local assembly met on this Church ground, though consisting of but two or three persons, has this to reckon upon, and where, therefore, there is real subjection of heart, unity of discipline and order is maintained between it and other gatherings meeting in the same manner.

As to local officers, it is true, they see no way in which these can be scripturally appointed. Both elders and deacons were ordained by apostles or apostolic delegates, and as neither apostles nor apostolic delegates now exist, they find no scriptural mode of ordaining them. What, then, must they do? Add to Scripture by inventing a mode of their own? Deviate from Scripture by allowing them to be instituted in a way different from that which is there directed? Assume that because no provision is made, God forgot to give us directions, or left the matter to our own discretion? Vastly different from any of these ways. Reckoning with unshaken confidence on the sufficiency of Scripture, assured that God would never neglect the minutest detail necessary for His people's guidance, judging the flesh according to God's estimate of it, and knowing that its wisdom would only

darken God's truth, they conclude that since no provision is made for officers being appointed, God meant that they should not be appointed. There were no officers left, after the apostles and their delegates were gone, but bishops or elders and deacons. Now Scripture gives no sanction to the idea of bishops and deacons being appointed by other bishops and deacons, or by synods of bishops and deacons, or by any other officer above both (for after the apostles' time there was no such officer), or by popular election of the various assemblies. Yet in one or other of these ways, infinitely modified and varied, all appointments of officers *have* taken place and *must* take place. That is, there is no possibility of having officers at all, but by some plan which does not rest on the authority of Scripture.


Which, then, we ask, is the true attitude for the believer to take—to act for himself without Scripture warrant, or to refrain from acting at all because he has no Scripture warrant? When Israel stood on the borders of the Red Sea, the waters in front and the Egyptians behind, God's word was—"Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord" (Exod. xiv. 13). Man's restless unbelief wanted to do something; God bids him do nothing, but wait for His word and work. So, in the wilderness, "at the commandment of the Lord the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the Lord they pitched; as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle, they rested in their tents" (Num. ix. 18). However trying it might seem to

linger month after month, and year after year in the same place, however slow their progress might appear, however much fleshly energy might prompt them to press forward, until God's express sanction was given, "they rested in their tents." Man might scoff at their inaction and call it foolishness ; man might censure their long delays and ascribe them to weakness. But "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." The Lord led them into the land in His own time and in His own way ; whereas when, on one occasion "they presumed to go up unto the hill top" in their own strength and without the Lord, "the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah" (Num. xiv. 44, 45).

Look, again, at the action of the returned remnant, in the days of Zerubbabel. Certain persons, supposed to be of priestly descent, "sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found." What was to be done ? "Decide the matter by human rules of evidence," is the natural reply ; "determine their status one way or other, according to the best light we possess." So would man bring in his own wisdom in the things of God. But Zerubbabel was a man of faith. He would not act without God. No motives of expediency, to strengthen the priesthood, would induce him to put them in without Divine sanction ; on the contrary, "the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not

eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim" (Ezra ii. 61-63). What a lesson for the day of ruin! How blessed and refreshing the faith, which, in the absence of Divine guidance, refuses to act in the wisdom of the flesh, or on the promptings of expediency, but simply stands still and waits patiently upon God!

But if those meeting simply in the Lord's name find no scriptural authority for office, if they conclude therefore, that God did not mean office to continue in a ruined Church, are they, on this account, left over to the self-will of man or to complete anarchy? So far from it, God has graciously shown us in the apostolic history, that assemblies are not dependent upon office at all. The Churches in which Paul and Barnabas ordained elders had, as we have seen, gone on for a considerable period and in times of great difficulty and trial, without any such officers. Titus, too, was to ordain elders in cities where, until then, there had been none. Will the same grace and power, which kept these early Churches before elders were appointed, fail to keep those which are in the same position now? What resource had they? God Himself—that God who "is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the Churches of the saints." Shall I say—"God is not sufficient for me; I must have some other provision, and since He has not made it for me, I will make it for myself?" Alas, how dishonouring to Him is all this appointment of officers, all this framing of rules and constitutions, without the



sanction, even in opposition to the teaching, of His Word!

And, if we look to the means, we see how God acts. He has given directions, which, if observed, will maintain order. Has He not said—"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder; yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility" (1 Pet. v. 5). Here we have a rule widely removed from democratic licence on the one hand, and with no reference to office on the other. It prescribes that godly subjection to age and gravity which nature enjoins and the Word of God ever inculcates. Where the mind was simple, there was a spiritual discernment of those who were fitted to exercise authority, quite apart from any appointment to office. We see this in the exhortation of the apostle to the Thessalonians—"We beseech you, brethren, to *know* them which labour among you, and *are over you in the Lord*, and admonish you" (1 Thess. v. 12). Here nothing is said about office, and as this epistle was written very shortly after Paul's brief sojourn among them, he must have deviated from his usual practice if he had appointed officers. Besides, how could they be exhorted to *know* them, if they had an official character? The natural meaning of the passage is, that there were certain persons qualified to bear rule and guide the assembly, and that there ought to be in the assembly godly discernment enough to recognise such persons, and godly subjection enough to own their authority.



This, then, is the Lord's provision now ; and if there is a subject heart and simple faith, its sufficiency will be readily recognised ; while, if we look at the sad history of the Church since the days of the apostles, we shall feel unfeigned thankfulness that the Lord has not perpetuated office in a ruined assembly, thus lending the sanction of Divine appointment to all the abominations and atrocities which have left their bloody mark on almost every page in the annals of ecclesiastical rule.

Office, then, has no longer any scriptural foundation, and to feign office, built on another foundation, is simply to use "strange fire" in the Lord's service. It is "the gainsaying of Korah," who, instead of accepting God's ordinance, brought in man's rights, and set these up against the institutions delivered by the Lord. It is true, indeed, that thousands of the Lord's real and honoured servants are themselves exercising, or acquiescing in the exercise, of unscriptural official functions. This shows that the Lord is exceedingly gracious, and will not withhold His blessing because of man's ignorance ; but it does not in any way alter His order. Every Protestant knows what godly and devoted men there have been mixed up with the errors and superstitions of Romanism, but this does not make these errors or superstitions any better. We are bound to own all that is of God, and to love all believers ; but this should not blind us to God's truth. One of the most fruitful sources



of error in all ages has been thinking of good men rather than of God.

But though office has disappeared, gift is just the same as it ever was. Office, in a ruined Church, would only have lent God's sanction to man's disorder. But man's failure and disorder have never hindered the outflow of God's grace. "The perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, the edifying of the body of Christ"—this has been going on amidst all the lawlessness and confusion brought in by man's self-will. How perfect are the Lord's wisdom and grace! Had He combined gift and office, He must either have sanctioned man's disorder by perpetuating office, or have left His people to starve by withdrawing gift. He has separated them, and thus has been able both to withhold His sanction from man's disorder by abolishing office, and yet to minister to the needs of His saints, and send out the gospel of His grace to sinners, by continuing gift.

Gifts are for the Church, even the Church in ruin. At no time have they been withdrawn. At no time has the risen Lord ceased to provide for His own by evangelists, pastors, and teachers. In having gifts, those who meet in the Lord's name, outside all man's divisions, are in no respect different from the rest of believers. But though they are not distinguished from others by the possession of gift, they are by putting it in its proper scriptural place. God has never in His Word authorised the restriction of gift to a particular local assembly; He has never sanctioned

the combination of gift and office, so that gift shall be exercised by virtue of an official position ; He has never given directions, in the assembly, for any person, official or unofficial, to prescribe the order of service, to regulate the persons by whom prayer should be offered, thanks given, praise uttered, or gift exercised. To say that this is necessary to maintain order is to say that God doesn't know how to keep order, but that man does. It is an addition to, or rather a deviation from, Scripture—a thrusting aside of God's way in favour of man's—a quenching of the Spirit, whose presidency is treated as a fanatical delusion and transferred to the hands of some humanly appointed official. Who does not wonder at the riches of that grace which could still go on supplying gift to His Church, even where it was so grossly abused !

Those who meet simply in the Lord's name have no choice but to revert in this matter to His order. Where there is any real spiritual apprehension of what it is to meet in that name as distinguished from human systems, there could be no thought of returning to the most unscriptural feature of those systems in superseding God's order by their own regulations, or in gagging and bridling the gifts of an ascended Christ by restrictions and conditions which He has never imposed. Instead of authorising an officer for whose appointment they have no scriptural authority, to exercise gifts which he may or may not possess, and to shut out the exercise of gift by those on whom Christ

has conferred it, they meet, owning no guidance but that of the Spirit, and leave the flow of praise, prayer, thanksgiving, exhortation, or teaching, in His hands. If the evangelist preaches the gospel to sinners, if a gifted teacher invites saints to gather for instruction, this is not a meeting of the assembly, and the gift is exercised, not in responsibility to the Church, but to God. There is no such thing in Scripture as the Church regulating gift, any more than converting it into a function of office. Those, therefore, who meet in the Lord's name only, and in subjection to Scripture, make no such attempts, but leave the matter as God has left it in His Word.

But it may be asked whether great disorder may not thus come in. Even if, where there is faith, the Spirit's guidance is sufficient, may not dire confusion result from want of faith? Undoubtedly, if the flesh acts instead of the Spirit, disorder will ensue. But what is the remedy for this? Is it to *provide* for the acting of the flesh, by setting up fleshly rules, or to look to God that He will keep the flesh from acting? Fleshly rules cannot prevent the acting of the flesh, but they can regulate it. They can keep things going on decently in spite of its actings, thus covering up the evil instead of letting it come to the surface. Is this what a truly spiritual mind would seek? Is it not better that if the flesh is acting, its true character should be discerned? And what is God's remedy? In the Corinthian Church, the very thing dreaded had occurred, and that in a shocking

and revolting form. How does God meet it? By recalling the Corinthians to His own order and mode of acting, never by authorising them to set aside His order and make rules of their own. If the meeting was in so carnal a state that it could not keep God's order, how much spirituality would there have been in the rules it prescribed for maintaining its own? Surely this question should be pondered by those who imagine that God's order is not sufficient, and that the only way of preventing confusion is to substitute an order of man's devising.

But is not a regular, paid ministry sanctioned in Scripture? "Do ye not know, that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? And they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so, hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1 Cor. ix. 13, 14). This undoubtedly authorises, what no godly person would ever object to, contributions from those who possess means for the support of those who are labouring in the Lord. A person thus labouring is justified in receiving such gifts as from the Lord, and he is not a true servant if he feels humiliated by so doing. But does this provision justify setting aside God's order of ministry altogether, and substituting for it an organisation of man's? It may be urged that unless a gifted person is confined to a certain congregation or circuit, unless the number of times he exercises his gift is prescribed, and unless the salary received is duly arranged, neither

side has any certainty ; the congregation may receive too little for its money or the minister too little for his labour. This is quite true, and what does it show ? That the moment we depart from God's order, a low fleshly standard of thoughts, reasonings, and motives comes in. Not that I would for one moment imply that all, or nearly all, of those in what is called the "stated ministry" are actuated by the commercial motives here suggested. Thank God, there are and have been multitudes to whom the bare idea of bartering gift for gold, measuring salary by service, would be as abhorrent to their own thoughts as it is contrary to God's Word. But this does not alter the system. If what is called a regular, paid, professional ministry is to be introduced in the place of God's order, this commercial argument is what is urged in its defence ; only showing to what poor, low thoughts we descend when we leave God's principle to bring in our own.

This ministry is man's ministry, and receives not a shadow of foundation, but direct condemnation, from Scripture. It was before any such human systems were devised that the words above quoted were spoken. Their application, therefore, was to something quite different from what is called the stated or professional ministry of our day. We see how it was meant to be applied in the case of the apostle. Though for special reasons he would receive nothing from the saints at Corinth, he did from other Churches. When he was in Thessalonica, the Philippians "sent

once and again unto his necessity." When he was at Corinth, he says, "I robbed other Churches, taking wages of them, to do you service" (2 Cor. xi. 8). But how different this from what is called a paid ministry. Here was one led of the Spirit to give up his time entirely to the Lord's work. The Lord would not let him want, and He supplies his lack by putting it into the hearts of individuals or of Churches to contribute to his necessities. Does anybody say—But how can an ordinary servant trust the Lord? If his faith is not equal to the occasion, it is manifest that the Lord has not called him to go forth in that way, and he will simply make a mistake to his own grievous injury, and that of others, if he attempts it. In such cases—and they are the vast majority—the Lord's direction is that he should work for his living, and honest work will not in anywise interfere with the proper exercise of his gift.

And those who thus gather in the Lord's name, rejecting all ministry but that of His own appointment, will seek to follow Scripture also in the object of their meeting. Where God's thoughts are put aside in one way, they will soon be treated with contempt in all. Our blessed Lord, on His last night with His disciples, just before the agony of the garden and the still more terrible darkness of the cross, instituted a feast as a memorial of Himself, specially showing forth His own death. When in the glory, to the one apostle who had never known Him on earth, and knew Him only there, He rehearses, as it were, this touching scene, and



again presses the tender words—"This do in remembrance of ME." Setting forth, as it does, in its very nature, the oneness of the Church, it is essentially an assembly-act, and, as might have been expected, was *the* act for which the assembly especially met. All the rest was, so to speak, by the way. The great object of gathering was thus to remember the blessed Lord in His own touching manner. One might have thought that if there was anything which even a Church that had lost its first love would not thrust into a corner, it would be this memorial. But what has been done? In the great majority of so-called Churches the whole meaning of the supper has been lost, and it has been converted into a means of grace instead of an occasion of worship and thanksgiving. Even where it has been retained in anything like its purity as to object, man has thought once a month or a quarter was quite often enough to remember Jesus in His own way, and has diverted the first day of the week from the object of doing Christ's will, according to His parting request, to the object of seeking for edification according to his own thoughts. Surely first love must not only have been lost, but have degenerated into Laodicæan lukewarmness, before so heartless a refusal, or so indifferent a compliance with the Lord's last injunction, could have been tolerated.

Those who meet in the Lord's name will necessarily revert to apostolic practice and teaching on this point also. No plea of expediency, no pretence of active service in the gospel, will draw aside the heart from simple

obedience, or cause any neglect of this exquisitely expressive momento of the absent Lord. Was He who instituted this feast more indifferent to the need of sinners than modern religious denominations? Was Paul one who indulged in the selfish enjoyment of the blessings he possessed, or careless of the spiritual darkness and death reigning around him? Should those, then, who seek, instead of following their own thoughts, to follow the Lord's command, and the apostle's example, be subjected to this reproach, they have only to "rejoice and be exceeding glad." Their answer to those who accuse them is this,—“Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye;” or again, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” The question is—Who shall be judge, man or God? Is the word of truth given for the believer to revise or to obey?

Such, then, is the course which remains open to those who seek to separate themselves from the ruin and confusion of Christendom, and walk with the Lord. To re-construct is impossible. As well try to put man back again in Eden. But to leave the paths of self-will and disobedience, to build again on the old foundations, to bow down before the sovereign authority of the Word—this at least is still possible; and we see what rich provision the Lord has made for those who would thus walk. Who would not rejoice, in the midst of conscious failure and weakness, to hear those cheering words, “Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; for thou hast a

little strength, and hast *kept MY WORD, and hast not denied MY NAME?*" (Rev. iii. 8).

But before we leave this subject, the question may be asked—"Have not those who have sought to take this place sadly failed? Have they ever realised this ideal unity? Or have they exhibited such a success as to draw others into the same faith?" Have they failed? "Much, every way." Have they realised the ideal unity? "No, in no wise." And why? Because the flesh in them is just the same as the flesh in others. But it is one thing to fail, and another thing to give up God's ground. We are told to walk even as Christ walked. No believer will deny that in this he has signally failed. What, then, shall he do? Shall he say—"God's standard is too high. I will set up a lower one for myself?" The very thought is monstrous. And yet this is just what Christians have done with respect to the Church of God. They have taken a conception of their own, instead of God's, and because they can come up to the standard of the flesh, while those who adhere to God's standard fail to reach that of the Spirit, they rest satisfied with their own systems and reject the teaching of God's Word. Those who have sought to follow this Word as their sole guide have done so with much failure, with only "a little strength," but while confessing it fully, they can rejoice that through God's grace they have been able to keep Christ's word, and not to deny His name.

Many doubtless have come into fellowship, drawn by the simplicity of worship or other motives, without fully apprehending the position taken with respect to the Church. When, therefore, a question arose concerning the oneness of Christ's action in discipline, some missed its true point, and while themselves clear from false doctrine, received those who still associated with the teacher who put it forth. This rendered them personally responsible for the doctrine, and separation became necessary. In many cases want of grace and want of love may have been shown. But this does not alter the principle, however much it should humble those who maintained it, and however diligent and earnest it should cause them to be in prayer for those from whom this painful separation had to be made.

But do not those meeting on this ground convert themselves into a sect by refusing to receive Christians associated with the various denominations around them? I reply, emphatically, that such is not their principle, though, of course, from ignorance or mistake, it may occasionally have been done in practice. The table is the Lord's, and any believer, not, like those just spoken of, responsible for false doctrine, has a title to take his place at it. A believer from any evangelical denomination, asking fellowship, would be received, provided he came duly accredited as to personal faith in Christ, and was not by his position in association with some false doctrine. But this is

a totally different thing from intercommunion. Those meeting in the Lord's name and on the Lord's ground, not as a sect, but on the true principle of the Church of God, cannot possibly have anything to say to sects as sects. They have left them behind, as not of God, and can enter into no arrangements that persons shall break bread one day among the sects and the next among them. Surely if one were to wish to act in this manner, it would be due to him and due to the Lord, that the difference of principle should be pointed out to him, and that he should understand the inconsistency of meeting at one time on a ground which condemns all sects, and at another on a sectarian basis. No man of conscience or intelligence, perceiving the distinction, would wish to pursue such a course. But this arises, not from any desire to exclude such a person on the part of those meeting in the Lord's name, but from the manifest inconsistency of the conduct itself.

The question for the conscience is, not whether those who take this ground have failed, but whether the ground itself is the Lord's. Sects and systems of man's devising have been shown to be contrary to God's Word. To say, then, as many have done, that there is no escape from them, is to say that God has made no provision for His people to walk obediently. Surely every spiritual heart will at once repudiate so fearful and dishonouring a thought. But if God has marked out a path in which the obedient may walk,

what is it ? It is clear that we cannot get into this path until we leave the path of disobedience, and therefore the first step is to separate from all those sects and systems which, as we have seen, derive no authority, but receive condemnation, from the Word of God. Having, then, got out of the path of disobedience, what finger-posts has God set up to direct us into the path of obedience ? He has given us His own Word to tell us how to meet. If, following that Word, we meet in Christ's name only, He has given us the promise of Christ's presence in our midst. If, in obedience to that Word again, we meet for the object which that Word prescribes, and in the dependence which that Word enjoins, bringing in nothing of man, but leaving everything in God's hands, He has promised us the guidance of His own Spirit. What do we want more ? Is it a constitution ? We have the Word of God. Is it a preserver of order ? We have the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Is it gifts and endowments ? We have the gifts and endowments of an ascended Christ. We may fail in faith ; but God, at all events, will not fail in faithfulness.

And now, in concluding, let us cast back a brief glance over the ground already traversed. We have seen that God has set before believers a present and precious hope of the Lord's return to take them to the mansions He has prepared for them ; that the



world, having refused the One in whom all God's promises of earthly blessing centred, has been left behind, and will not receive the rich promises in store for it until judgment has been executed ; that during this interval of Christ's rejection by the world, God is gathering for Him a heavenly people, His body and His bride, and that for this purpose the Holy Ghost has been sent down to form this people into oneness with their heavenly Head ; that the people thus gathered out are heavenly in character, have before them a heavenly hope, and will share the dominion of Christ over creation as His heavenly bride ; that while here they are not to expect an earthly portion or to seek after earthly power, not to mix themselves up with the world, as though they belonged to it, but, as those who partake of Christ's earthly rejection, to be separated from it and awaiting the heavenly bridegroom ; that their responsibility is to bear witness for Christ here, showing forth the heavenly character and heavenly oneness into which they are brought ; that in this testimony they have signally failed, not answering in any way to God's thoughts, but departing entirely from His Word, setting aside His order, showing to the world a divided Christ ; and that the true path of obedience and subjection which the faithful are now called upon to pursue is to detach themselves from all the human systems, to gather simply to the name of Christ, to accept no ministry but that which He has given, no

presidency but that of the Holy Ghost, and no rules and regulations but those enacted in the inspired Word. This may be a lonely and a trying path, but it is the path of obedience, the path of faith, and the path of blessing. May our hearts be led to walk simply in it.

THE END.





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